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THE INCA'S TREASURE

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE KLOOF BRIDE

THE LOST REGIMENT

THE DESPATCH RIDER

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THE INCA'S TREASURE

BY

ERNEST GLANVILLE

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. H. BUCKLAND

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THE HUGE SERPENT STRAINED ITS ARCHED NECK BACK, ALMOST LIFTING HIM OUT OF THE WATER

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THE INCA'S TREASURE

CHAPTER I

THE MINING ENGINEER

JAMES CUYLER ELMORE, mining engineer, was well and favourably known in the City of London. His report on the wealth of the Witwatersrand gold mines had brought him fame and fortune. The fortune he had lost in his efforts to increase it by speculation, when he was caught with many more experienced in the "slump," and forced to realise his dividend-earning shares in order to pay for the losses on worthless scrip. The reputation he still enjoyed; but there was no need in the bad times then hanging over the Transvaal for the services of an engineer, and for some weeks he had in vain been seeking for an appointment. His friends in the "market" were always ready to give him a "free call" on speculative stock, but having been once hit, he feared to revive the gambling instinct which had so mastered him in his brief time of wealth, and somewhat offended them by declining their offers.

He had, however, got back now some of his old buoyancy and confidence, for he had received a letter asking him to call at the temporary offices of the Condor Gold Mining Syndicate, to consider the offer of an appointment as acting engineer.

He found the offices on the second floor of a building which from the names in the hall appeared to contain

no rooms not devoted to gold-mining companies, and he was shown into a large and well-furnished room where two gentlemen sat at a table littered with plans and documents. They were strikingly dissimilar. While one was large in frame, with keen grey eyes, hard, weather-beaten face, and stern, cruel mouth with a grey moustache of stiff, military cut, the other was younger, slight and dark, with black, sleepy eyes, and delicate, oval face.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Elmore," said the older man, standing up and presenting a sinewy hand. "I have read your report, and I said if I could get a man like you to write a report like that about our property I would be satisfied. My name is Colonel Colston, and this is my partner, Mr. Juan Ferdinand."

The dark man bowed, and in a soft voice, with a slightly foreign accent, expressed his pleasure at meeting Mr. Elmore.

"I understand you are open to an engagement?" said the Colonel, coming at once to the point. "Well, to be brief, we are anxious that you should go to Peru to report on our reefs. The terms are: all expenses, a house, and a fee of £5,000 for a year's engagement."

The young engineer hesitated.

"I will pay £1,000 into your bank when you have signed the contract," continued the Colonel. "We are not millionaires, otherwise we would gladly increase the offer."

"The terms are better than I have a right to expect, Colonel Colston."

"Then you accept?"

"Really, sir, you take my breath away," said Elmore, laughing. "There are several things I would like to know—for my own sake, as well as for yours. Where are the reefs situated? Are you satisfied that there are more than indications of gold? Could you place machinery on the mine at a reasonable cost? And is the climate healthy? I ask this last question because

I could not go without my brother, who has been recommended to a dry climate."

"Rest assured that the climate is dry and bracing," said Mr. Ferdinand, "and if you must take your brother, do so. Is he young, may I ask?"

"Very young and delicate."

"The trip and the voyage will benefit him, and, if I may suggest, the expenses can be made to cover his cost to you. As for the other matters you have mentioned, our offer is perhaps the best guarantee that we are satisfied with our claims. But if they do not come up to our expectations, that need not influence you, since, of course, the risk is ours, and your task will simply be to examine thoroughly and report fully."

"There is one word more to be said," struck in Colonel Colston, "if you agree to our terms you must be ready to leave in two days. We wish to float our company in London as early as possible, and we should like to receive your first report by cable within two months. That would allow you fully three weeks to make your conclusions. If your report is unfavourable, we drop the mine; if encouraging, we proceed. Here is a plan of the mine, and full details of the development work already done. Look through the papers and give us your answer."

Elmore took the papers, and he saw at a glance that if the report of the work done and of the richness of the ore, and width of the reefs were correct, this was no "wild cat" mine.

"Come, Mr. Elmore," said the Colonel impatiently, "there is no need for long consideration. There is our offer. The mine is in Peru. The money will be paid into your bank this afternoon, after we have lunched. Do you accept? Yes or no?"

"I accept," said Elmore slowly.

"Then that's agreed, and I hope neither of us will regret the connection. Have a cigar? That's right. I suspect the man who never smokes. And now you and Ferdinand look through the papers while I book

your passage," and the Colonel, with a large cigar between his lips, and a tall white hat jauntily cocked, left the room.

"I see," said Mr. Ferdinand, with a slight smile, "you are not at ease over this matter. But for my part, I think you have done well; better, I may say frankly, than squares with my knowledge of the work to be done. However, the Colonel is of opinion that a fair report under your signature would be better than a very good one from some one not so well known. You see," he added, with a shrug of his shoulders, "the value of fame."

They went through the reports of two engineers and one Government official, as well as through a map of the district, and in the afternoon Elmore left without the shadow of a doubt, and with a very friendly feeling towards Colonel Colston.

"I cannot congratulate you," said Mr. Ferdinand to his partner, after the engineer had gone. "Why, Colonel, the man is both proud and honest."

"Ah, my youthful friend," replied the other, "you have much to learn about the British public. Elmore's name will send the shares to a premium. We require money for the treasure hunt, and we need it soon. I am weary of the delay."

"But I tell you the man is honest."

"I can understand your feeling of antipathy on that ground, my friend."

"And can you understand that he will never send a report worth the value of the stamps on the letter?"

"Ah, will you wager on that?"

"Thank you, no; if I gather from that offer, you have something in your mind, and I do not bet in the dark."

"What do you say to my having booked a passage on the same boat for yourself and Marion?"

"Bah! I object to her being mixed up in this affair."

"You forget that she has the honour to be my daughter."

"About that I presume there can be no doubt," replied Ferdinand, with a sneer.

The Colonel leant forward, and looked steadily at his friend. "There's something about you," he said, in quiet, meditative tones, "that sets my teeth on edge. That poor devil of a Chilian, who went with us through the Pampas, had the same effect. Curious, is it not? And we also were great friends before he disappeared. *Savez!*"

Ferdinand shifted uneasily under the other's hard gaze. "Your memories are very unpleasant," he said.

"And you do not see any further reason to laugh at my plan?"

"Since you have not explained it, you can scarcely expect an opinion from me, but remember, I love Marion."

"Well, what of that?"

"What of that," cried the young man, starting up, "do you think I am a block—a machine without blood, or feeling, or passion?"

"I sometimes forget, my friend, that you are so young, and that love is ever selfish. I am a little curious. Does Marion love you?"

"I sometimes think so," said Ferdinand, his large eyes looking brilliant.

"Then you are the first person but herself she has ever loved. Be convinced that if her affections are once fixed they will never be moved. Now as to this voyage, I will ask her to prepare."

"You mean her to go? Why not leave it to me to influence Mr. Engineer Elmore, if that is what you mean? I have never yet met a man who would not do a mean thing at his own price."

"And I have not met a man who could not be tempted by a clever and pretty woman. It costs less, my friend; if you are an artist, you will appreciate Marion's strategy."

Ferdinand paced to and fro, then he said, with a trace

of anger, "I do not like it. We should keep her out of our plans. For you it is unnatural, for me it is cowardly."

"Then you remain in London," said the Colonel calmly. "I will go out instead, and Mr. Elmore will be privileged to do the thousand and one attentions which a woman expects on board. And if you remain in London you may be sure I will not wait your arrival to make a further search for the treasure in the valley."

"I will go," said Ferdinand, with a swift glance full of suspicion.

"You would be a fool if you did not," was the blunt reply; and the two proceeded to discuss their plans in greater detail.

Mr. Elmore, in the meantime, had gone off with a light step and a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth—a smile which drew upon him the close attention of all the string of match and collar-stud and boot-lace vendors from the Bank right up Cheapside. He entered a toy-shop where he bought a pistol that fired dried peas, and with this formidable weapon in his pocket set off briskly for his lodgings, which were in a dingy street off Gray's Inn Road.

He nodded to a little face at the window, and bounded up the stairs.

"Now, little chap, tell me what I've got for you?"

A little boy, who may have been seven, went slowly up to his brother and felt the bulging pocket, while his large brown eyes were fixed gravely on the smiling face that looked down upon him.

"It's a gun!" he said slowly, a red spot flaming on either cheek, while he clasped his hands behind him, and quickly shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Who told you?" said the big brother, laughing.

"The coal-man," said the little one gravely; "and the bullets come from the dark hole—Bang! fire!"

There was a great sigh of content when the pistol was loaded and the first pea sent "bliff" against the wall.

"How hot your hands are, sonny. Where are you going, Jack?"

The little chap, with the toy firmly clasped and his thin lips set in long, straight lines, was making for the door.

"To shoot the black tiger," he said, in a tragic whisper.

"Ah, yes, where is he?"

"I know; he's under the bed, in the black. He growled—'Arrh!' and now I'll kill him. You come behind. Don't be frightened."

Upstairs they went; the door of the little bedroom was softly opened, the little chap glanced at his brother and went down on his knees, and the pea from the pistol rattled against the skirting.

"There!" with a sigh, "he's dead. He won't frighten a little boy any more."

"No, he won't frighten you again, little Jack," and the smile went out of the man's face. The working of the active little brain had often troubled him of late.

"Jack," he said, when they were again in the dingy sitting-room, "we are going over the big sea to a land where the sun shines all day, where there are tall trees, and pretty birds, and fruit; where the ants live in houses, and you can run about everywhere."

"And play with Black-nose and Ricki-ticky?" said the little one.

"What's that?"

"Why, you know."

"Oh, yes," said the big brother vaguely, "and we go in a great ship."

"Big as this table?"

"Much bigger."

"Bigger'n the street?"

"Big as the street. And you will get strong and tall."

"And keep Ephelum to ride on?"

"Perhaps a pony would be better than an elephant—a pony all for yourself, little chap."

"A white pony with a black nose and a straw tail, same as the coal-horse. *Oh!*"

"Are you glad?"

"And you won't take me to see no girl, like that one who hit me?"

"She didn't hit you, Jack," said Elmore softly.

"Oh, yes, she hit me with her eyes. She doesn't like me, but she likes you. In a big ship! And can I lie down on the ground and watch the ants?"

"Oh, yes, of course. You can play about all day. Why do you think she likes me, Jack?"

"'Cos she rubs her cheeks to make them red. I arst her. There are a many fishes in the sea, brother."

"What did she say when you asked her if she liked me?"

"Who? That girl? Pooh! I will shut her in the ant-house and they will eat her all up. There's tigers in the sea, and I will shoot them dead. Oh! Look at the leetle birds."

"Where, Jack?"

The little chap fixed his dreamy, sleep-laden eyes on the ceiling, and pointed with a little brown finger.

Elmore looked about with a puzzled expression, for he could not follow the little brain in its workings. But he sat patiently on listening to the stream of prattle until the little boy slept.

A few minutes later he jumped into a cab, and was whirled off to West Kensington, to pay a visit from which he expected to gain his heart's dearest wish.

CHAPTER II

PARTING

IN the time of his prosperity, when he was much talked about and much sought after by those people of no employment and many pretensions who regularly hunt the city for "options" and "calls," Elmore was taken up by Lord Boulders, an ex-Colonial Governor whose powers of administration were then concentrated on the control of one hundred acres of gold-bearing gravel.

It was at a garden party given by Lord Boulders that Elmore first met the Hon. Beatrice Dunell, a young lady with the most ravishing complexion, the biggest of hats, the smallest of waists, and a gliding walk that was a revelation of grace.

As she gave her finger-tips to him, standing very erect, and smiling into his eyes, he fell straightway hopelessly in love, and remained fixed in stupid adoration without a word.

She laughed—a soft, melodious laugh, in keeping with her wonderful charm of person.

"Mr. Elmore, Beatrice," said Lord Boulders, "is a man to whom we are much indebted, since he has set our doubts at rest by proving the existence of gold on our properties beyond the dreams of avarice."

"Oh, how interesting," she said, in rather high-pitched tones. "Find me a seat, Mr. Elmore, at once, and tell me all about your discoveries. Frankly, I love gold and gold-diggers."

"I was not a gold-digger," he said awkwardly.

"Really, it did not occur to me that you were," she said, sinking gracefully into a seat with such art that she did not have to re-arrange a single fold of her dress. "We all pretend we know as much about gold mines as formerly we did about horse-racing, and the greatest desire of each one of us is to get what that charming man, Herr Best, calls a 'gilt-edged tip'. You will now know what is expected of you."

"I never advise any of my friends to buy shares as a speculation," said Elmore, looking with a bewildered air at his beautiful companion. "If I may venture to say so, I would strongly urge you not to speculate."

"How very provoking you are!" she said, with a dazzling smile. "See, there is Herr Best. I am sure he is telling Lady Boulders something very good. That little, quiet man."

"Yes, I know him."

"You know him? Bring him to me," she said. "I cannot waste all the afternoon."

"I am sure I beg your pardon," he said, rising, "I have no wish——"

"Sit down," she said, just touching his arm with her fingers and shooting a glance at him that swept away his resentment and left him tingling with vague hopes. He sat down at once, but looked away, feeling, if the truth were known, rather shy.

"Mr. Elmore!" she said, almost in a whisper.

He turned with another thrill at the softness of the tone, and found her eyes fixed dreamily on space.

"Why is it?" she continued, in the same low tones that compelled him to lean forward, "why is it that men never treat us in a spirit of frank *camaraderie*; that you always assume a manner and give us none of that friendly feeling that men are so quick to show to each other? Why not treat us as beings like yourselves—moved by the same interests that concern you—why not treat us as friends?" She moved her face on her hand and looked at him.

"If you count me one of your friends, I would be happy indeed."

"It is hopeless," she went on, with a little sigh. "You know you would not say that to a man. You would have answered something like this, 'My dear fellow, let me put you on to a good thing'; and you would share with him without the slightest hesitation any special information you had learnt. If you wish to be my friend you may have that happiness, but only on the condition that you treat me as a friend."

They both laughed, and in ten minutes he had not only told her what to buy on the market, but had stipulated as a privilege of his friendship that he should be allowed to act as her broker. That friendship—charming as it was to him—had cost him his fortune; for he bought, like many others who thought they knew as much, at the wrong moment, and in addition to paying up the losses, he was foolish enough to give her fictitious profits, which she took with a delight that made him ashamed for the smallness of them.

Miss Dunell was at home and alone. He never remembered the occasion when, if in, she was not alone, and he sometimes felt wounded at the selfishness of her aunt, Mrs. Milcent, who was her guardian, in leaving her so much to herself. She was sitting in a rocking-chair, as he entered, and did not rise, but continued to swing to and fro with one foot daintily outstretched and her hands clasped at the back of her head. Her beauty was to him always a fresh surprise, and he stood now looking down at her in a sort of breathless amazement.

"Have you no greeting?" she said lazily, looking through half-closed eyes, with a triumphant smile at the corners of her lips.

He sighed and trembled with a sudden inspiration to answer the glance that seemed to challenge him.

She sighed too, then leant forward, clasping her hands round her knee, showing an exquisite profile, and the shining coils of hair with innumerable tiny curls that had escaped clinging softly to her ears and neck.

"How beautiful you are!" he whispered.

Heaven knows she had determined to move his admiration, but now he so bluntly expressed it she was displeased.

"I am sorry you have found your voice at last," she said coldly.

"Ah," he said bitterly, "how easy it is for you to put me right with a word or a look. You once spoke to me of friendship, but you are not often friendly; not," he continued moodily, "that I value friendship as between you and me. It is not fair to me—and you."

"Well," she said, raising her eyebrows, "I certainly prefer you silent."

"How can you expect me to treat you as a friend?" he said, sitting down and looking gloomily at her. "Friendship is possible only on equal terms; but there is no equality between us."

"I hope not," she murmured a little disdainfully.

"While you treat me with the indifference of an old acquaintance I cannot stand on the same plane, for you ever appear to me to be so remote, so unassailable."

She smiled. "And have you come to ask me to stoop from this pedestal on which you have placed me?"

"To stoop! No," he said slowly, "I have come to say good-bye. I am going away."

She rose and walked to the window, where she stood looking out with her hands clasped behind her. "What a glorious sky!" she said. "Do come and look." He walked to her side, tugging nervously at his moustache. "What a marvellous tint! Does it not remind you of your African sunsets?"

He glanced at the blaze of colour, and, with the selfishness of love, saw nothing in the glory but the signs of his own misery.

"So you are going away," she said, with a sigh that barely reached him, "and on the eve of your going you tell me that our friendship is broken."

"You know why," he whispered hoarsely.

"Why?" she asked, and turned to look into his eyes, which spoke the message more eloquently than could his tongue. "Why?" she murmured again, lowering the long lashes.

His resolution went. "Why?" He stepped forward impetuously and seized her hand. "Because, Beatrice, I love you—I love you."

She glanced quickly through the window, and gently withdrew her hand from his grasp. "We can be seen here," she said, "and there is some one looking. I believe it is Colonel Colston, the American millionaire."

"It is," said Elmore, staring down at a tall, erect, well-dressed man, who was leisurely crossing the road.

"Do you know him?" she asked eagerly.

"You wish me to introduce him to you?" he said angrily.

"I already know him," she said. "Probably he is calling on me, and will be announced soon. I am disposed to deal more kindly with you than you deserve, and to tell him I'm engaged."

"You are very kind," he said quietly, "but I have much to do, and the little chap is all alone. We leave in a day or two for Peru, where I am to report on a gold mine, and if in six months Jack is strong, we will return."

"Six months!" she said, letting her hands fall. "It is a long time. Must you go? I thought you meant to settle in England."

"So I did," he said eagerly, "but the doctor has urged me to take Jack away to a dry climate."

"You could send him to a school abroad; and really I think it would be best, as you coddle him too much."

"He is not strong enough," he said, a little hurt. "Now I must say good-bye," and he held out his hand.

She made no effort to take it, but looked at him with a smile. "I see we are still friends," she murmured.

"I don't understand," he said, for her eyes held him in a spell, and his love fought hard again for utterance.

"That is how friends say good-bye, with a hand-shake

and a careless word, and they part, and there follows another hand-shake, and another light word, and some one else steps lightly into the vacant place."

He heard a ring at the door. "Ah!" he said, "and here comes the some one who is to take my place."

"Do you, then, value yourself so lightly?" she said, still keeping her hands behind her.

"The suggestion came from you." He heard the Colonel's deep voice in the hall, and forgetting everything, he cried, "Not as friends let us part. Beatrice, I love you; give me a word of hope to take with me."

The Colonel's firm tread was on the stairs. She stood as if listening, then she said softly, "Think of me, then, but not—as a friend."

He sought her hand, but not finding it, pressed his lips to hers, while her eyes, soft and beautiful, looked over his shoulder at the door. A second later, his face radiant with joy, he met Colonel Colston in the passage, and wrung that gentleman's hand in the most hearty manner.

"I will claim you," he had said, "when I come back," and she had smiled and blushed and sighed. He looked back into the room with all the joy in his face as the Colonel met his demonstration with a grim face, and saw her standing by the table turning over the leaves of a book with an air of languid indifference, and the sight a little dashed his joy.

"Good-bye, Elmore," said the Colonel, in his deep tones. "Mind you don't miss the boat, and if you satisfy me I will see what I can do for you. By the way, you will meet a charming travelling companion on board. Good-bye."

"Didn't know Elmore was a friend of yours," he said, as he advanced into the room. "Good sort of fellow. I am sending him out to report on a mine." He looked at her keenly, as if he would like to read what it was she could have said to the young engineer to make him look so happy.

"Mr. Elmore is quite an old friend of mine," she replied calmly. "I have known him an age—ever since the time of what he called the 'boom in Kaffirs'."

"That was eighteen months ago."

"Oh dear, no, that would be a lifetime in friendship—about three months since."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Colonel, "that explains it," as he recalled what he had been told of Elmore's losses during that period. They have been speculating, he thought, and he has paid her losses. Perhaps she still thinks him to be a man of means. "Do you know," he said aloud, "that Elmore has almost ruined himself on the market?"

"Really! Poor fellow. I am so sorry to hear that. And you have given him this appointment to help him. How good of you!"

"Not to help him, to help myself!" And the Colonel smiled rather grimly, for there was no sympathy in her tones, neither surprise. "But," he continued, "I did not come to discuss Elmore. This is a business call."

"You flatter me," she said, with an ironical bow. "Business! I presume you wish me to interest myself in a bazaar or a mothers' meeting?"

"I wish Lord Boulders, your uncle, to be chairman of my company, the Condor Gold Mining Co., and I have so much confidence in your influence that I want your aid."

"What a singular proposal!" she said coldly. "Am I to understand that you are talking seriously?"

"Certainly, Miss Dunell. Let me speak plainly. You have a keen intellect, coupled with other more charming qualities, a combination which, if you chose to use your gifts, would make you powerful, either in politics or finance, where many clever, ambitious, and titled women have won triumphs. I assure you, you would find a keen delight in the great battle of intellect that is continually waging outside your narrow domain."

"And you ask me to enter this field in order to make

my uncle the first victim of the skill you attribute to me?"

"Not a victim. I admit my chief concern is for myself, but though his presence on the board would directly benefit me, he would lose nothing in honour or in pocket. Lord Boulders, I understand, has great confidence in Mr. Elmore, and I am quite prepared to let his acceptance of my proposal rest until he receives Mr. Elmore's report on the property."

"But why should I interest myself in this matter, Colonel Colston?"

"I said that I was talking business. I trust, therefore, you will not misunderstand me when I propose to make over 1,000 shares in your name, which you would do well to sell soon after the flotation of the company."

"Really, Colonel Colston," she said, with a laugh, "I am disposed to try this little experiment. I presume Lord Boulders has sufficient experience in these matters to judge whether all is right, and I need not be concerned about him. You must, however, write down all the particulars, as it is Greek to me."

"I will call to-morrow," said the Colonel, as he stroked his moustaches, looking slightly disconcerted, "with everything properly in writing. Now that is done with, perhaps you could add to my indebtedness by telling me your opinion of Mr. Elmore. The work he is engaged upon is highly important, and personally I know little of him."

"And yet you told me that he had suffered great losses."

"Oh, that is the talk of the market."

"Perhaps it would be as well," she said calmly, "if you went to the 'market' for further information."

"A good answer, but severe."

"Pardon me, no. I never speak about my friends, and I see no reason why I should be called upon to give a character to Mr. Elmore."

"Then you really have no great interest in him," he said, with an air of concern.

"Suppose," she answered, "we talk of something else?"

"Certainly," he replied, with a bow. "May I consult you about the fitting of a state-room in my yacht?"

"A yacht! Oh, how delightful! There is no charm like that of the sea, no pleasure equal to that of yachting."

"What a lucky chance!" he said, though he had heard her say something of the sort before, and had carefully stored it up in his memory. "I myself love the free life of the pleasure cruiser, and the idleness of it, and the dangers to be overcome in stormy seas, and the opportunities for seeing new countries and new peoples."

"I have never been far."

"Then you have not tested the full delight of a voyage, and may I hope some day to include you in a party on board, to visit our gold mine in South America? Indeed, it is with that hope that I have secured the *Water Sprite*."

"A cruise to the Southern Seas! That is what I have dreamed of often. But it is impossible. I am not an emancipated woman."

"My dear young lady," said the Colonel impressively, "do not think that I have forgotten Mrs. Grundy. She will sail with us, and the voyage may benefit your aunt."

"How kind of you!" she said sweetly. "But Mrs. Milcent detests the sea as much as I love it."

"Well, any one you like," he said gaily; "and at any rate, I understand you are to be one of the party. She is a beautiful boat, and seaworthy."

The Colonel soon after took his departure.

"He must be very rich," she murmured, as she looked at herself in the mirror.

"It is evident," reflected the Colonel, "that Elmore is in love with her, but is she in love with him? I hope not, for his sake; if she is, well, the Valley of Despo-

blado will settle that obstacle. Poor devil! I believe I am sorry that he should be taking his little brother with him."

About the same time James Elmore was standing beside the bed, looking sadly down at a flushed face. "Dear little chap!" he said softly. "I hope I am doing well in taking him."

CHAPTER III

THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER

ELMORE was not given much time to make his preparations. He next morning received directions to embark at Blackwall that very afternoon, and while he was struggling with his irritation at the untimely demand, Mr. Ferdinand looked in to soften down the abruptness of the order.

"It's a wretched nuisance," he said. "I am as much annoyed as you are, but despatch is absolutely necessary to the success of our plans, and unfortunately for you and me, Colonel Colston last night discovered that the steamer *Guanaco* was leaving to-day. I hope this explanation will be sufficient apology for the hurry."

"I saw Colonel Colston last night, and he said nothing about the change in the day."

"When you know the Colonel a little better, Mr. Elmore, you will find that he is not very considerate. May I take it that you will be in time this afternoon?"

"I will be there," said Elmore, with a sigh, as he reflected that he could not repeat his good-bye to Miss Dunell.

"Thanks, very much. Then I can get through my preparations, though, perhaps, I am in one respect more fortunate than you, or more to be pitied."

"How is that?" said Elmore, with a smile.

"I leave no fair lady to grieve for my absence. Come, don't pretend you cannot understand. The Colonel told

me he interrupted you last night in the midst of a touching farewell. Between you and me, my friend, the Colonel was scarcely pleased. By the way, who is the lady?"

"Perhaps you had better ask the Colonel," he said haughtily.

"Ah, well," said Ferdinand, with affected heartiness, "don't you lose courage. Colston is a dangerous man with women, but you have youth on your side. Until this evening!"

Ferdinand took his leave with an air of overdone politeness, having fully succeeded, if that were his object, in disturbing Elmore's peace of mind.

The Colonel himself, however, was as blunt and genial as ever when they met later on board.

"You're beginning well, Elmore," he said. "I like a man who can be ready to leave for any place at a moment's call. Like Napier, eh? Snatch up a tooth-brush, a comb and brush, jam them into a bag, and there you stand prepared for any expedition. How's the little brother?"

Elmore had been holding Jack's hand a moment before, but now he could not see the lad. A brief search discovered the child standing with his hands clasped behind him, his legs wide apart, looking gravely up at the skipper, who, standing in a similar attitude, was staring blankly at the boy. This was the scrap of dialogue overheard by Elmore and the Colonel:—

"Have you got any chilluns?"

Grunt!

"Have you got a mother?"

Grunt!

"'Cos I ain't, but I've got a gun and a lot of ants, and spiders, and a tiger—Gurr!" And with a blood-curdling roar, the little fellow went down on his hands and knees on the grimy deck, and rubbed his nose against the skipper's leg.

"Well, I'm blistered," growled the Captain aghast;

then he caught the youngster up and hoisted him to his shoulder, from which position he looked with calm triumph at his brother.

"There he is, Colonel," said Elmore, with a look of pride and a smile of gratitude to the Captain.

"He's too young to take with you," said the Colonel sternly, after meeting the boy's questioning glance, as the Captain pranced off.

"But the doctor recommends a warm climate," Elmore responded, a little surprised.

"To my knowledge doctors have repeatedly sent patients away when they were past all hope. There is one place which may well be called the City of the Dying from the number of doomed men sent there at the last gasp almost, to linger on amid strangers, without means, without friends. Take my advice, leave your little brother behind."

"You told me I would find a dry climate."

"Dry enough," said the Colonel shortly.

"A dry climate is necessary for him."

"Very well, Elmore, but remember that I warned you in time."

"In time! And we sail in an hour! But you alarm me. Are you holding back anything? Is the country unhealthy? Or is there any danger to be encountered? For I tell you plainly, I accepted your offer as much for his sake as mine."

The Colonel took a turn up and down the deck, pulling at his moustaches. "You are quite right. Elmore, take the little chap. The voyage will set him up, and if you find the country too rough, why, send him to Marion, my daughter. By the way, let me introduce you, since you are to be fellow-passengers."

They went down to the saloon, where was a young lady seated at a table with her hat on, and before her on the table a basket of flowers, behind which she was hiding her face from a little boy who stood on a chair opposite. It would have been hard to say whose eyes

were the brightest—hers which sparkled between the flowers, or his which danced with fun.

“I see you,” he shouted gleefully. “You has kissed the roses and the red is on your mouth.”

“You delightful little rogue!” she cried. Then she saw her father and rose, while Jack at the same time, catching sight of his brother, scrambled from the chair, seized his hand, and drew him forward.

“Kiss her!” he cried. “I like her, I does.”

Colonel Colston smiled wickedly. “Quite right, sonny; that is much better than a stiff hand-shake. Marion, this is Mr. Elmore, and that little mischief is his brother.”

She bowed with the smile still on her lips. A tall, graceful woman, with wonderful black eyes, but a look of gravity that seemed out of keeping with her youth and beauty. “Your brother and I are already very good friends, Mr. Elmore; indeed, he has made violent love to me, and paid me the most delicious compliments.”

“I hope he has not been troublesome,” said Elmore.

“Dear little boy, no. I was sitting down a moment ago, feeling a little melancholy, when across the table I saw a pair of large eyes looking sadly at me. It was some time before I was convinced it was really a little live boy, then a smile broke slowly, and he offered to tell me a story.”

“About Black Nose and White Nose,” murmured Jack, gazing up into her face with a look of intense admiration. “The Captain brought me here, and I’m to be a Captain, too, some day.”

She smiled back down at him. “What funny names! You must tell me all about them.”

“When I go to bed,” he said, “you can come and listen.”

The Colonel laughed again. “That’s all right. He has made friends with Captain Roberts, who is the surliest man I know, and captured my daughter, who is the hardest to please of all women. My daughter,” he

continued, "is a thorough business woman. She knows all about the mine, and she is in full possession of my views on the matter. Don't be afraid to discuss the matter with her, Elmore."

Miss Colston's face clouded over at once, and in place of the brightness that had made it look beautiful, her features took on a cold expression, reflecting in subdued tones her father's look of sternness.

"My father does me the honour, Mr. Elmore," she said, with a trace of bitterness, "of confiding a part of his schemes to me, without regard to a woman's natural curiosity as to the development of them. This is the more annoying, as I have an impression that they end in disaster."

She turned away with a sigh.

The Colonel presently went to his daughter's cabin, and closed the door.

"Look here, Marion," he said bluntly, "understand me once for all. You will follow out my instructions, not only to the letter, but with all the skill I know you possess. You must influence this strait-laced engineer in such a way that his inclination will be to give a favourable report of the mine before he sees it."

"He will not be influenced," she said calmly.

"That is what Ferdinand said; but there is no man living that has not a weak side, and I trust to your woman's ingenuity to find it."

"Suppose I decline?" she said, meeting his gaze.

"You will not decline," he replied coolly, "for you are too clever. If this scheme fails, I fail; and if I fail, you will be left penniless in Peru, with no future except such as my dear friend Ferdinand can offer you."

"And you tell me that—my father!"

"It is the bare, ugly truth, my dear, and that is why you must not fail."

She made a hopeless gesture.

"You must not forget your duty to me," he went on. "I am growing old, Marion. I have made many

sacrifices for you, and I expect you to make me this return."

"But," she murmured, "I am afraid you are hiding something. If I cannot influence his judgment, what scheme have you in reserve?"

He looked at her steadily, reflecting, and then he added, "Be satisfied that it will be the better for him if you succeed."

"Then you have some other resource—some dark plan that may endanger his life and the life of that dear little boy?"

"You are growing morbid, my dear, and the voyage will restore the tone of your mind. What I mean, of course, is that it will be better for him financially. I would rather trust you in this matter than Ferdinand, who is clever, but too impatient and too ready to take a short cut to his goal when he meets with a check."

"Why do you force that man upon me?" she said in tones that quivered with indignation. "You know how I detest him."

"Have patience, Marion," said her father gently, though there was a glitter in his eyes that mocked his words. "Think how patient I have been, my child, and pretend, like me, that you like him."

"But why? Surely, surely if you dislike him——"

"Dislike!" he muttered, with a grim smile.

"If you hate him, then."

"I hate no one. No one is worth the effort. I fear him."

"You!"

"Yes, Marion. I do him that honour, and you know your father well enough to understand that if he fears it is for sufficient cause; but my dear Ferdinand does not know it, and don't let him suspect by any sign of yours."

She looked at him with a white face, as she remembered all she knew of his hard, unyielding nature, and wondered what there was hidden that could make him fear any man.

"So, Marion," he said, speaking sternly, "remember that if this plan fails, I fail; and if I fail, Ferdinand will be the only man in a position to befriend you. Play your part well, and in three months you will be your own mistress, free of him, and free of me. Good-bye, and a pleasant voyage."

A moment later she heard him in hearty tones greeting the very man he had been talking of, and with a shudder she sank back into a seat.

There she was sitting when the door swung gently open, and a little face appeared.

"I did knock three times. The big man told me to come, and I've brought my brush."

She smiled sadly at him, and he ventured in.

"What have you brought your brush for?"

"To brighten you up; the big man said so, and," with a queer look, "here I is."

She snatched him up and pressed him to her heart in a passionate embrace, with a sob for her own sorrow.

He wriggled to the floor.

"Are you going?" she pleaded.

"Wait a minute," he said breathlessly. "I'll fetch my brother. When I cry, he tells me about Ricky-ticky: he'll tell it to you, see?"

"You tell it to me yourself, little boy," she said, taking him up again.

Straightway he plunged into Mr. Kipling's wonderful story of the mongoose and the cobra, opening his eyes so wide when he came to the tragic parts that he appeared all eyes and nothing beside; and as she watched the changes in his face with a sort of wonder, the thought of her own lonely childhood came back to her.

"You and I are to be friends and playmates," she whispered. "After breakfast every day you must take me for a long walk up and down the deck, and in the afternoon you will tell me about Ricky-ticky."

"And Mowgli," he said. "Brother can tell it us." He stared at her with a child's attentive regard. "I likes

you. I likes you better than the other lady. She said she would send me to a school. And brother likes her."

At once she disliked that other woman, and at the same time, so swiftly does one impulse follow another, she felt a little resentment against Elmore himself, while she saw, too, with a shudder, that this little friend might be used to further the task of forcing the engineer's hand.

"I feel tired in my head," he murmured; and she realised from the motion of the ship that the voyage had begun.

She held him in her arms till gradually his eyes closed, when she noticed with a sudden pang how fragile he looked, with his slender hands and the dark shadows under his eyes.

Presently she laid him on her bunk, sprinkled his damp forehead with eau-de-cologne, then went noiselessly out into the saloon, where she found Elmore patiently waiting.

"He is asleep," she said. "You had better leave him with me to-night."

"Thank you!" he said gratefully. "The poor little chap is not strong, but I hope the voyage will set him up. You are very kind, and I am glad he has, as the children say, taken to you, for he is a little fanciful in his likes and dislikes."

"We have sworn friendship," she said, with a brilliant smile that lit up her face.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONDOR GOLD MINE

COLONEL COLSTON began at once to bait his trap for the speculating public. He supped that night by arrangement with Mr. Neyland, who had built up a fortune as a financial agent, and was notorious in the City for his gallantry and the raciness of his anecdotes, as well as for his faculty for scenting out a worthless enterprise. More prospectuses of new companies, principally mining, passed through his hands for the financial press, than through those of any two other agents combined, and in a "boom" period his offices were besieged from morning till night by an army of importunate canvassers.

It was Mr. Neyland's boast that he would not act for any company promoter whose prospectus bore on the face of it the signs of a "wild cat" scheme; and as his judgment carried weight in the City, the fact that he had accepted a prospectus had a favourable effect on the flotation of the company. He included, too, in his wide list of acquaintances, all the leading "guinea-pigs," a class of ornamental financiers whose evident respectability and childlike faith in the intrinsic merits of the company they represent admirably unfit them to inspire the shareholders with confidence.

Colonel Colston wished to appear to Mr. Neyland as a man ignorant of financial matters and anxious to learn, while at the same time thoroughly familiar with men and women. He began by telling his guest an anecdote that was both wicked and witty, and then flattered him by the

heartly appreciation with which he listened to a series of appalling stories, that no one but a light comedian could have remembered, or related so well.

"My dear fellow," said the Colonel, laughing heartily, "I have met many brilliant anecdotists in my time, but never your equal. Gad, if I had your gift, I would talk myself into the president's chair of any one of the half-dozen republics I know. I would frustrate a revolution with a joke, and capture the women with a story—the little rogues."

"The women are rather fine, eh?"

"You must come and see them, my boy. Such eyes, such glances, such figures. What memories, ah! what memories! And the Colonel, dropping his voice to a sigh, took up his glass and drained it. "But I must not waste your time. What do you think of that draft prospectus?"

"It's too —— thin," said Neyland bluntly; "badly drafted and all scissors and paste."

"I drew it up myself," said the Colonel, looking mortified, "and I took another prospectus as a model."

"I knew it. You copied it from the prospectus of the Great Rock. There's no 'body' in it, nothing convincing; and, moreover, the public won't touch South Americans, a country that smells of nitrates."

"But there's gold there!"

"Ah, there's gold everywhere, even in London clay. If you have no more to tell the public than what's in the draft, my advice to you is to save yourself further expense. There is not a man in the City whose opinion is worth having who would lend his name to your company."

"But I have just sent Elmore, the engineer, out to report on the mine; and you must do me the credit to believe that I would not have gone to that expense unless I were confident of the value of the property."

"My dear Colonel, I do you the credit of believing that you are familiar with the A B C of mine flotation."

"I am disappointed," said the Colonel. "I had set my heart on having my company floated under the best names in the City; and my friend, Lord Boulders, who, by the way, has promised to join the board, particularly recommended me to secure your aid."

"What! Has Boulders joined?" said Neyland.

"He will join."

"Then, Colonel, you must have told him more than you have seen fit to tell me. Boulders has a reputation for extreme caution in these matters. He could not afford to join a doubtful proposition."

"Lord Boulders knows Elmore and trusts him. If Elmore's report is favourable he will join at once."

"A conditional promise only."

"I am quite satisfied," said the Colonel; "you see, I know the property."

"Suppose, then, Colonel, I agree to publish the prospectus and make all the necessary arrangements conditionally on Elmore's report proving favourable?"

"I agree!" said the Colonel heartily. "But in the meantime you will keep the financial press informed regarding Elmore's trip, and put in a judicious note occasionally about the prospects of the property."

"Leave that to me, Colonel Colston, that is one of the rudiments of my art."

"Now, Mr. Neyland, I am so sure, so absolutely convinced of the richness of the mine, and of the favourable nature of Elmore's report, that I will place £1,500 to your credit to-morrow for advertising expenses, and will give you a call on a thousand shares at par, in return for any services you may render me in the flotation."

"Ten thousand at par," said Neyland coolly, and he took a note of the transaction, while the Colonel passed him over a slip of paper, giving a call at par to be exercised within three months.

"I can introduce you to a man who may be of use to you if you have not filled your board, or have a few blocks of shares to be underwritten," said Mr. Neyland.

"Lunch with me to-morrow at the 'Thieves' Kitchen,' in the City. You understand, of course, he will require commission."

"I place myself in your hands, Mr. Neyland," and, with a hearty hand-shake, the two parted.

"Seems a decent sort," muttered Mr. Neyland, "but rather simple. Doesn't know he's got a good card in Boulders—though he played him off on me very smartly. Hum, hum, hum, not much of an option. Fancy offering me a thousand at par. Not up to the ropes. Why, a journalist would expect as much."

"If I don't get that fifteen hundred out of him and a great deal more," thought the Colonel, as he lit a cigar after hailing a cab, "I'm a Dutchman. That was a masterly stroke of mine about Boulders, particularly as his lordship has probably not yet heard of me or the company. He must be captured next, and I'll get him on board the yacht to chaperon his niece. Between her coaxing and my statistics, backed up by the fact that Mr. Neyland, the smartest agent in the City, is on my side, his lordship will surrender within a week."

Next morning the financial papers announced that Mr. James Elmore, the well-known engineer, had left on a special mission for the Andes to report on a gold reef, said to be of extraordinary richness. A few days later there was a paragraph in the "Society" press noting that Lord Boulders, with Lady Boulders and Miss Dunell, had joined a party on board the beautiful yacht of Colonel Colston, the South American millionaire, who was understood to be largely interested in the valuable gold mine which Mr. Elmore, the famous engineer, had gone out to inspect.

The Colonel was a perfect host, courteous to all and considerate. While keeping himself in the background and according to Lord Boulders the premier position, he was equally attentive to each guest. The ladies found him delightful, the men declared he was a thorough good fellow, and Lord Boulders, who took no

man on trust, and was inclined to regard his host with suspicion, found himself disarmed by an exquisite politeness in which he, experienced though he was, could detect no sign of flattery. In his later days his lordship had missed the deference accorded to him when a Colonial Governor, and he appreciated the homage which was conveyed in the most delicate manner by the Colonel, and, very soon in the voyage, by the other guests.

It fell out as the Colonel supposed. Lord Boulders did question him about the mine, and he answered at first cautiously, so that his lordship was forced to return to the subject again. Then he played off Neyland, and when the week had passed Lord Boulders had consented to be chairman, on the condition that Elmore's report was favourable.

"I have done my share of the work," said the Colonel later to himself, "and Ferdinand must do his share—if Marion fails. They had better marry, and settle on the Hacienda Morro before I go there. The Hacienda Morro! Once there with twenty of my old filibusters, no law could reach me. I wonder how Beatrice would like the idea? I could represent the hacienda as a castle, the valley as a kingdom, herself as the queen. I think so." He rang the bell.

His man appeared, a servant who combined the duties of butler, waiter, and valet. This man had a fascination for the Colonel's guests. He was so little like a menial, so much like a brigand; being hard, rugged, and sullen, with smouldering black eyes, and huge moustaches, trimmed to conceal an old wound on the cheek.

"Well, Gomez," said the Colonel, looking at the man with a slight smile, "you are no doubt reconciled to this climate?"

"Malediction!" growled Gomez, under his moustaches.

"There is a lady who wishes you to be her footman. How do you like the idea? Silk stockings, pink velvet

doublet, and powdered hair. You would resemble a matador."

"It pleases your honour to make sport of me."

"You are not gallant, Gomez. What shall I say to the lady?"

"If the señor no longer has use for me, I would like to go back to my country, where I would know well how to deal with those who insult me."

"An insult!" said the Colonel, with a frown.

"Yes, señor," said the man firmly; "you forget that I am not a servant, and it is an insult to make sport of me."

"So!" said the Colonel coldly. "You can go, then."

The man looked at his master with proud reproach, then, without a word, turned to the door.

"You can go, Captain Gomez."

Gomez spun round, his head up, eyes blazing, and his hand at the salute.

"You will procure here," continued the Colonel sharply, "forty of the latest breach-loading rifles, ten thousand rounds of cartridges, and take ship to Lima. There you will get together forty of the most trusted men of the old band, horse them, and proceed to the old rendezvous."

"The Hacienda Morro?"

"You will hear of my movements through the old agent. Does that suit you better than the post of lady's maid?"

Gomez brought his heels together and saluted. "Ah, my Colonel, I live again. I smell the *carne el cuero*. I hear the music of the fandango, the rattle of accoutrements, the wind blowing over the vast forest of Montana."

"Ay, comrade," said the Colonel, with a sinister smile. "We lived then."

Gomez saluted, twisted his moustaches, and swaggered out and down the stairs.

The Colonel leant back, looking up at the tobacco smoke curling up.

"We lived then! Lived! Can I ever forget the dark forest, and the darker tragedy it holds? And yet I am going back! And yet I am sending out this poor devil of an engineer and his little boy! How the boy called up the dead, the memory of that little dark face, with its eagle nose and strange, fierce grey eyes, and her head bent over in tears! Will I never forget, never?"

A look of terrible remorse crept over his face, leaving it ashy grey and lined. But it stayed there only a moment. With a harsh laugh he rose and went out. His erect, military figure was now well known in Throgmorton Street, and jaded City men, always anxious for the relaxation that a fresh type afforded, were glad to entertain the stranger who had daringly proposed to enter within their territory, to listen to his story of war and love, and to give him tips that were of no value to him, and to relate to him the scandal—for of all scandal-mongers there is no one greater than he whose time is passed in the storm and struggle, in the shifts and sallies and whirligig of the share market. They smiled good-humouredly when he ventured an opinion on their business, and gravely related extravagant myths when he asked for information—after their way. But all the time the keen, hard grey eyes of the soldier were measuring the man he himself proposed to victimise, and his quick brain was storing up all the hints and suggestions they dropped among themselves.

CHAPTER V

A WARNING

WHILE the Colonel was busily engaged preparing the way for his mining venture his confederates on board the *Guanaco* had been quietly studying James Elmore, the engineer.

Elmore, however, was not a man to be easily read. He had not lived two years in Johannesburg without learning the lesson that reticence is a virtue to be cultivated, and when Mr. Ferdinand began his advances, he found himself baffled by the engineer's blank refusal to discuss the question of the mission at all.

Miss Colston and Jack were great friends. One day they were sitting, Jack in a lounge chair propped up, and Miss Colston by his side, with her chin in her hands and her eyes fixed on the sea.

"What are you thinking of, little boy?"

"The sea is a basin," said Jack slowly, "and the sky is the lid. In the night the lid shuts down, and we are alone in the dark with the Big Thing."

"The Big Thing!"

"It sleeps at the bottom of the sea in the day," he continued solemnly, "and when it breathes the water moves. In the night it comes up. It creeps round and round, after the ships. I seed it the other night, through the hole in the cabin. It is blind and can't smell, but it opens its mouth wide, and if the steamer goes in it is lost."

"Who put that awful idea into your head?"

"It comed there. There's a many things in the sea, but they don't talk, as they're afraid the Big Thing will hear them. They always live in a hush, always—with frightened eyes all starey; and the Big Thing creeps round, in a hush, too. I want to go where things can speak. This round and round makes my head tired."

"Cheer up, Jack," said his brother, "and very soon I'll give you a great blue and red parrot that will talk and whistle and bark like a dog."

"And a pony, and the flowers and the green trees?" And the little boy, shaking himself from his weariness, sat up with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks. "I will make a house in a big tree and hear the birds talk and laugh. And I can keep ants and caterpillars. Will we come there to-night?"

"Not to-night, sonny."

"But I will get there, shall I?"

"Oh, yes; and you'll get strong and brown," said the elder brother, taking the fragile hand and stroking it fondly.

Miss Colston leant back and looked at them with an expression full of pain. Elmore, glancing up with a smile, detected the look. She rose and walked to the side.

"What is it?" he whispered, joining her.

"It hurt me to hear you talk like that to him. The country is not what you imagine. It is dry, depressing, and almost treeless. You must not take him with you, but when we land leave him with me. Oh, why did you bring him?"

"I scarcely understand," he said, after a pause. "Your father warned me at the last moment not to take him, and then said I was right. I am afraid there is some mystery behind all this."

"I cannot say," she murmured, "but he is so weak and the country is so dreary—so terrible in its monotony."

"Is that all?" he said, somewhat sternly.

"All? Oh, you do not know. I have lived there. I have crossed the pampas—the wide, deadly flats, where there is no green thing, nor living creature beside the suffering mules and the tired men; where there is no shade, no relief from the intolerable heat, until the dreary night closes down, in a silence that is appalling, on the dreary day."

"Is that all?" he insisted, "or are you not keeping back something?"

He looked at her coldly, and she met his glance with a look of entreaty. They were wonderful eyes, dark and fathomless, but he saw no beauty in them.

"You have told me I am doing wrong. It is not a light thing to say, and if you have cause for your words you should have told me before. What you have said does not alarm me, for the boy needs sunshine and warmth. I ask you again, is there anything you have kept back?"

"I have told you," she said softly, "because you are strong and he is weak; because when you are wrapt up in your work, the loneliness will crush him; because I love him."

"I love him, too," he said with a glance at Jack. "Why, sonny, what has become of the lady's pear?"

"It runned away," he said, "down a hole."

His brother looked round for the hole. "Where?" he asked.

Jack opened his mouth wide and pointed down the gaping throat. Then he blinked solemnly up at his brother.

"You ate it?"

"I specks I did. I were sitting here with my mouth open, like the Big Thing, when flop! the pear jumped right in—see?"

Elmore looked at his brother with a puzzled glance, and Jack studied his face attentively.

"I were so 'sprised," he murmured, "that I ate him—see?"

"I'm sorry," said Elmore, turning to Miss Colston, with a half-smile.

"Sorry!" she replied, with a ringing laugh. "I would not have missed that explanation for all the pears you could bring me."

"I cannot make out," he said, still apologetic, "where he gets these ideas."

"He has the gift of imagination; and it is a pity," she continued frankly, "that you have not a share in it."

"I would like to know your opinion of me," he said, with an amused smile.

She looked at him steadily for some moments. "I think you are a cold, self-contained, conscientious man, who would always do your duty in a mechanical way, and about the worst companion for a little boy."

"I think you are mistaken," he said quietly.

"I trust I am," she said, with a slight curl of her lip, "and if I am, you will leave him with me when you go to the mine."

"We have always been together," he said, "except when I was in South Africa, and it was then he grew ill. I will not leave him out of my care again until he is strong. So please say no more about it, and I must endeavour to bear up under your unflattering opinion."

She stooped down to kiss the little chap, then with a slight bow to Elmore, moved away, evidently piqued, while he sat down in the chair, feeling worried and ill at ease. He was convinced that there was something in the business that was not straightforward. For himself he did not care, but he dreaded any risk to the little brother. There was the touch of a small hand on his, and a little voice spoke out in tired tones.

"Brother, the sea is my head, moving round and round."

He took Jack in his lap, and spoke to him in a low voice of the wonderful things in the sea, the corals and the caves, until the drowsy eyes closed. Then he carried him off softly.

"Put him in my bunk," said the Captain; "he'll find it cooler and steadier."

"That chap's sterling oak," said the skipper to Miss Colston, "he looks after that little chap like a woman. That's a queer youngster. I told him the other day I was tried. Says he, 'You go and lie down, and I'll take care of the ship'. 'How would you manage?' says I. 'Why,' he says, after thinking, 'I would stand with my hands behind me, so,' placing his legs apart, 'then I'd look up to the mast, then I'd stare hard at the sailors, so,' and he glared at the bo's'n, 'then I'd say, Here, Mr. Smith, send some one aft to coil that rope, do you hear, you lubber? This ship's not a—perambulator!' You take note of this, miss: when that child has got his eyes fixed as if he were looking beyond the blue, he's just making a mental note of something. When I saw you three sitting together awhile ago, I passed the remark to Mr. Ferdinand, 'What a pretty group!'"

"And what did Mr. Ferdinand say?"

"Here he comes, miss. I was telling Miss Colston what a picture the three made in the bows."

"Of domestic bliss," said Ferdinand, with a sneer, "ruffled, it seemed to me, by one of those trifling misunderstandings which serve to enhance the joy of reconciliation."

"There are two people in this ship," said the Captain slowly, "that I'd be proud to call my friends, and they're Miss Colston and Mr. Elmore."

"That's scarcely flattering to me, Captain."

"I leave flattery to them that say one thing with the tongue and another with the eyes;" and the Captain marched off stiffly, with his hands behind him.

"The Captain seems to have a cloudy idea that he was giving you the benefit of his sympathy," said Ferdinand; "but if he knew everything perhaps he would find in me a more fitting subject for condolence."

"Do you wish me to agree with you?" she said coldly.

"Marion, you are trying me very hard. Is it fair?"

We are partners in this business, and you treat me as if I were your enemy. I have loved you for years with your father's approval, with his good wishes—more than that, with his ardent support; but I have never presumed to appeal to——”

“Why do you remind me of it now, then?” she said, with an effort.

“Because I cannot bear to see you kind to that prig of an engineer.”

“I am not kind to him,” she said proudly.

“If it is not kindness,” he said gloomily, “what is it? You smile at him, you laugh with him, you grow interested in your talk.”

“Evidently you keep a close watch on me,” she answered scornfully.

“Good heavens, Marion, you are never out of my thoughts—never. What has he done that you should seek him out?”

“I do not seek him,” she retorted coldly; “besides, you forget that it is my duty to carry out this distasteful work which necessitates some sort of conversation.”

“There is no need,” he said, “there is no need for you to take another step that must be distasteful. Believe me, I had no part in that. I was against your inclusion in the plan, and I can carry it through without your help.”

“How?” she said quickly, with heightened colour and sparkling eyes.

“Simply enough,” he said. “I have in my possession an original document drawn up by him.” He paused and noted her growing interest. “If I were to tell you,” he said, “you would warn him. I see it in your face, but by Heaven!” he continued, sinking his voice to a whisper, “if you do you will be responsible for the ruin that will fall, not upon him or upon me, although we would both be involved, but upon your father.”

“On my father!” she said, startled.

“Yes,” he continued, in a voice of menace, “on Colonel

Colston. I have been patient long in the hope of winning your love, but if you place a limit to my patience yours is the responsibility for the consequences. I tell you this not in menace, but in warning. You have placed this man, this stranger, before me, placed his interest before your father, and that will end all."

"What am I to do?" she murmured.

"Do? Leave this matter to me," he said quickly, with a return to his more gentle manner. "You have said it is distasteful to you. Well, take no further action; and, Marion, if you cannot love me, do not think of Elmore—he is already pledged."

"Really, Mr. Ferdinand, you are intolerable. Mr. Elmore and his love affairs have not the least interest for me; please do not refer to him again."

"Ah, Marion, pardon me, and if you can, pity me. I am even jealous of the attention you pay that little boy." He looked at her appealingly, with the look of a dog almost in his black eyes, shining out of his pallid face, the more pallid for its fringe of black beard.

"And do you wish me to take no interest in him also?" she asked scornfully.

"It would be base to ask that. The boy is ill, he is perhaps dying."

"Oh, don't say that!" she cried. "If anything should happen to him I would feel that I was guilty."

"The brother insisted. His is the blame."

"But he has not our knowledge of the country. You must promise me that you will let the little fellow run into no risk. If ill happens to him I will never forgive you, no, never."

"But consider! The child is weak, and the country—well, you know the pampas and the mountains."

"I don't care, I don't care," she cried passionately, "he must not suffer."

"Marion, what I can do for him I will: more I cannot say. But as for Elmore himself, he must take his chance."

"And what is that chance?" she whispered.

"It is such as other men have taken when they are working with Colonel Colston," he said darkly. "His risk is no greater than mine, not so great; since when his task is ended, and he can end it for himself safely, mine begins, with the development of that larger scheme."

"There is a risk, then?" she said, searching his face.

"There may be a risk for him if he is fool enough to be too honest," he said, with a hard smile, "but for me, I tell you I would not move another inch in this business, so certain are the dangers before me, if it were not for your sake."

"I am groping in the dark. You frighten me by what you keep back. Speak plainly, and let me judge for myself."

"There are some things," he said gravely, "that I cannot tell your father's daughter. But trust me, have some faith in me, and I swear you shall have no cause to dread anything. I will do this if you give me hope, I will send Elmore and the boy back by return of steamer."

"If I trust you," she whispered, looking at him with a pale face as she remembered her father's words, "if you send them back, may I too return?"

"To make love to him!" he said passionately. "By Heaven, no! I am not so generous. If I do this you must remain as my wife."

"No," she said faintly, "no!"

CHAPTER VI

A FORGED REPORT

FERDINAND had given Elmore a draft report of the mine, and this the engineer examined with the air of a man who expects little for his trouble. Very soon, however, something caught his attention, and he settled down to read through it carefully, and as he read a look of intense amazement gathered on his face.

Going on deck he sought out Ferdinand, who was in the smoke-room sitting alone apparently absorbed in no very pleasant reflections. His ready smile came to his lips, however, when he saw Elmore at the door.

"Sit down!" he said. "Steward, two cocktails."

"Not for me," said Elmore coldly.

"Do you never drink?" said Ferdinand irritably. "You don't smile. I've not heard you laugh. You give me the blues, and Heaven knows I am worried enough."

"So I should think. I have read through this thing," taking from his pocket the report, "and I wish to know whether you mean it as a joke."

"A joke! I did not find it such."

"So you wrote it—or shall I say, forged it?"

"Upon my word, Elmore, you try my patience."

"I have read this report, and I find it is almost word for word a copy of a report which I drew up on a Transvaal mine. You must have known, I presume, that I would have detected the resemblance."

"Of course," said Ferdinand blandly.

"Then what the devil do you mean by such a piece of transparent trickery?"

"Don't get excited," said Ferdinand, laughing. "You should be pleased at the compliment. You will do me the credit of admitting that, though I have followed your style, the facts are different."

"I am not a child," said Elmore. "That report must have been drawn up long after your visit to Peru, if you have ever been there, and since you are capable of adapting my words, you probably invented your facts, as you call them."

"My dear fellow," said Ferdinand calmly, "I don't know why you should take this high hand with me, and I do not care. I was against accepting you for the post, but Colonel Colston insisted that you were the right man. He paid you, very foolishly, a heavy fee, and he placed so much trust in you that he allows the whole success of his work to hang on you. I ask you now, do you think you are acting well by him?"

"But what am I to understand of a document like this?"

"I do not myself see that there is anything in it to arouse your suspicions. On the contrary, if you think for a moment, the copy is a proof of its genuineness; for if there had been anything wrong you would have been the last person to whom I would have shown it. Besides, my dear fellow, this paper cannot possibly influence your judgment when you make an examination of the mine."

"I don't understand it," said Elmore gruffly.

"I will do this. You may make a copy of this report and hold it, so that if you do find any ground of complaint against me you can make use of it to prove that I must have been a bad egg because I copied another man's report. You see I have so much faith in the mine that I am willing to run the risk."

"Nonsense!" said Elmore doubtfully. "Perhaps I have been too hasty."

"But I insist," said Ferdinand, with polite firmness. "I know you do not like me, and I cannot say I love you; but at the same time I like to retain a man's self-respect. You said that I had forged this. That is a strong expression. I wish you therefore to make a copy of the report and to keep it by you until you have examined the mine. You can then see whether my facts are correct."

Ferdinand continued to press this upon Elmore, and made it so much a personal question that at last the engineer consented to make a copy of the paper.

Ferdinand went away aft with a curious smile on his lips.

"It's the way with these men," he mused, "who are so stubbornly fixed in their honesty. They are as easy to twist as a child. He does not think much of my report now, but I wonder what he will think of it when he sees it reproduced as his own? If he lives to see it, of course."

As the voyage lengthened out Jack grew stronger, until at last he was always on his feet, either paying a visit to the seamen in their stuffy quarters, or following the big quartermaster on his duties, or making a tremendous pretence at pulling on a rope. He was ready to talk to any one; and the dumbest sailor of the crew, who seldom said anything beyond a grunt, would submit to be cross-examined about his female relatives. At first the sailors told him yarns; but they never had the chance to spin more than two, for, having got the hang of their methods, he would fix them with his round, solemn eyes, and tell them the most extraordinary tales about the sea, and ships, until they would forget to smoke.

They entered the Gulf Stream, whose warm waters glowed with life and colour, touched at New Orleans just long enough to make them long for land, passed along to Panama, were whirled through glaring foliage to the blue waters of the Pacific, and took passage with-

out delay in a dirty little coaster to Lima. A new population seemed to spring up around them. The sailors were coloured, the passengers rang the changes on every shade from ebony to white, and many races were combined in one individual—negro lips, the long, coarse hair of the Indian, the lantern jaws of the Spaniard. The people talked perpetually. They laughed, they gesticulated, they grew into sudden passion over trifles, and forgot their anger the next instant, and, as a foil to them was the reserved calm of pure-blooded Spaniards, whose blood had thinned.

Ferdinand seemed to change in the bright atmosphere among these new people; changed with his clothing. His neat yachting cap was replaced by a fine Panama straw, a gleaming red cummerbund encircled his waist, and his eyes sparkled, and his politeness was more expansive and more dangerous. He was at home, like the rattlesnake on the hot sands.

As the blood in his veins ran quickly, as it does in the sun-warmed rattlesnake, a change for the worse was noticed in two of the others. Miss Colston looked with something like abhorrence at the dark, light-hearted, shallow people about her, and she followed Ferdinand with a glance that was sometimes timid, and more often full of suspicion. In the little boy the change again grew marked. At first the brighter sunshine, the glorious colours, the perpetual chatter, filled him with delight, that sent him capering from stern to bow in a wild endeavour to miss nothing; but gradually he grew listless, until as the voyage ended he would not move from his chair, and would sit for hours with his large eyes open. Elmore himself was wrapped up in his own composure as in a cloak. He took the changing scenes without surprise and without much interest. His thoughts were continually fixed either on the object of his journey, or his love, or his little brother.

At last they arrived. The dreary, arid shore stood under the lee in all its brown ugliness, relieved a little

by the white houses of the town and the gay colours of the dark-skinned, indolent people.

"I am sorry, Elmore," said Ferdinand, as they sat together the first evening in the "patio" of the hotel, "that I cannot go with you. There are many matters which urgently require my attention here, but I have a trusted guide who accompanied me on my last trip, and he will escort you. After all, perhaps it would be better if you went without me, since your judgment will be absolutely uninfluenced."

"Is the man here?" said Elmore briefly.

"He is here. Pedro, the muleteer. He is a man of action, after your own heart; silent, but prompt." He rose, and presently returned with a native picturesquely dressed.

Elmore looked at the man carelessly at first, and then with a keen glance, for he saw the man was taking evident stock of him. Their eyes met. They grappled for a pause, then the black eyes wavered before the cold blue eyes.

"That man," was Elmore's thought, "will give trouble if I don't master him. Does he know his duty," he said, "that he is to lead while I control?"

He will take his orders from you."

"Si, señor," said Pedro. "I have ten mules of the best, and my desire is to reach the mine as soon as possible."

"That is well," said Elmore. "I would like to know how long the journey will take, what supplies you have, the nature of the country we travel over, the distance we cover in a day?"

"We shall be several days on the road, and there are supplies for ten days. We shall do twenty miles in the day, and for three days before entering the mountains we shall pass over the pampas, where the señor will find little water and much discomfort."

"That is well answered, Pedro. On the seventh day, then, we must be at the mine."

Pedro took another furtive look at the engineer, then withdrew and Ferdinand also.

A moment later Miss Colston entered the "patio" as Elmore was still standing.

"What have you decided? Tell me," she asked, with brilliant eyes telling of suppressed excitement.

"Why, Miss Colston?" he said, in a tone of surprise. "We have discussed nothing that should give you alarm. We were merely mapping out the journey with the guide, as Mr. Ferdinand does not go."

"Ah, I knew it! And that man, does he go?"

"Yes. What is the matter?"

She looked at him earnestly. "Mr. Elmore, I have warned you once before. I warn you again. I know that man. He is a desperado—an outlaw—whose pardon has been purchased. He is not a muleteer, and Mr. Ferdinand would not have selected a man like that, with the full knowledge he has of his character, unless he has some sinister object."

"Miss Colston," said Elmore, "you have used language of warning before, but you have never given me a single reason for your suspicion."

"Oh!" she said, with a stamp of her foot, "you are cold. I know this man. I know Mr. Ferdinand. They are both men to be feared."

"But in this matter they must be guided by your father."

"My father is to be more feared," she whispered, growing deadly pale.

He smiled.

"Mr. Elmore," she said, drawing herself up and speaking with a solemnity that was convincing, "I know that this enterprise is not honest. I know it from a sad experience of their ways, and because I myself was allotted a part in the conspiracy to warp your judgment and to influence you to write a report favourable to the mine, which I believe has no existence. I entered into the conspiracy willingly, and merit your contempt; but I

saw it was hopeless, and never attempted to carry out my part of the contract." She smiled bitterly. "I believe, however, that Mr. Ferdinand has made the attempt, and I presume he has failed."

"What you have said, Miss Colston, does not surprise me. I have had to deal with men before who are clever and not very scrupulous. It is a risk we must expect in our profession, and we guard against it."

"But you don't understand," she said impatiently. "These men will not fail. Think! Have you not done anything that will give them an advantage? Have you," she continued, dropping her voice, "done anything that will make it impossible for you to send any other report than what they wish sent?"

"No," he said.

"Well, then, they will intimidate you when you reach the mine. I am certain of it."

"I thank you for putting me on my guard, Miss Colston; but it is my duty to proceed, and if they try intimidation, well, I think they will fail."

She made an imploring gesture.

"Consider," he said, "no enterprise involving the least risk would ever be taken if every vague report were heeded. If the mine is worthless no power would tempt me to make a favourable report."

"Not if they threatened your life?" she asked, with a burning glance.

"Those things are not done now," he said. "But I will report myself and my journey to the British Consul before starting."

Her hands fell to her side, and the tears came into her eyes. "But you will not take the little one," she whispered.

"Yes," he said coldly, "he will go with me."

"Oh, you are selfish," she cried passionately. "Is there nothing I can say that will move you? Consider, what would become of him if anything happened to you?"

"My dear Miss Colston, you talk as if I were bent on an expedition of great danger. I am much obliged to you for the kindness you have shown Jack on the voyage, but I think you are too anxious."

"I wish you could feel a little of the foreboding that fills me," she said. "This country has none but painful memories for me, for I have seen plans carried out which have ended in darkest tragedy and failure. It seems to me as if there brooded over the land a curse, handed down from the peaceful nation despoiled and slaughtered by the Spaniards, but never before has the presentiment of sorrow weighed so heavily upon me as now."

He looked at her with fresh interest. Her magnificent eyes were fixed, her face of singular pallor had an expression inexplicably sad, and when she turned her eyes upon him he felt stirred by a sensation of doubt and fear.

A little figure came running into the "patio". "A man came into my room," he cried eagerly. "He crept round, and he crept round, feeling; and he stood looking at me."

He caught her hand and his brother's and stood between them, linking them together.

"This is another fiction of yours," said Elmore, looking down at the boy.

"You two has been talking loud words, like two women-girls I saw in the street, and they snapped their fingers. You must be kind to each other, you must."

"What did the man do in your room?" she asked.

"He jes looked at me; and there was nothing but his eyes, for his face was in the dark, and he put his finger on his lips, so, and he shook his head, and then he drew his hand across his neck quick, and turned his head sharp to one side. Then he went out, and I runned away. I was not frightened, but the dark was all moving."

"I will go and see," said Elmore.

"And you will stay with me, Jack. We will go across the square, where there are many lamps to chase away

the dark, to the big church. There you will hear music, and see the lamps swinging like stars."

They went out, and presently Elmore found them in the silent cathedral, among a quiet group of kneeling women. Standing back in the shadow of one of the pillars he watched Miss Colston's bent figure and Jack at her side, his face turned up to the dim spaces of the lofty roof.

CHAPTER VII

RIGGING THE MARKET

MISS DUNELL had thrown herself into the City world with much zest, and had found a keen excitement in the gambling which, under the disguise of ordinary business transactions, involved thousands in the most gigantic ventures of chance. Women are not such good losers as men as a rule, but they have the gambling instinct, and when they do speculate, they stop at no half-measures. Miss Dunell had not the slightest hesitation in turning to use the homage paid her by the young brokers at her levées. Colonel Colston was an habitual attendant. He liked to be seen in the Park with the most beautiful woman there. He liked it because he had much gallantry; but he liked it more for the opportunity it gave him of meeting many eligible young men whom he could invite to lunch, with a view to business. He paid court to her in an airy way, which she accepted in a like spirit, and he made her presents which she accepted always with a fresh air of delight that greatly pleased him.

He found her one morning in one of her most graceful attitudes.

"The battle has opened," he said. "I have heard from Elmore, and his report is splendid. He has inspected the mines and thoroughly bears out my facts. You are the first to learn."

"You have really received the report?" she asked, with a look of joy.

"Yes, the prospectus will be out next week. In a fortnight the shares will go up to £2 premium. I will sell at £2. They will then fall to below par, below £1, you know, and I will catch the 'bears'."

"You will catch the 'bears'!"

He laughed like a boy. "Yes, I have thought out a magnificent plan where you could help me. Your little interest would be worth £2,000 to you."

"How delightful!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands, "and what will you make?"

"What do you think?" he said, sitting down and looking at her with undisguised admiration.

She arched her brow. "Perhaps £5,000."

"Thirty times that! Thirty times that, my dear young lady. I won't be satisfied with anything short of £150,000."

"Then you will leave us, I suppose?" she said, with a sigh.

"I have already made my preparations for flight."

"Flight!"

"Like the swallows—a migratory flight. I am a bird of passage. I follow Nature round the world, and woo her in her most winsome garb. I will live in one perpetual spring."

"And I am to remain in this land of gloom?" she asked.

"I hope you will come with us," he said. "You are made for greater things; and I know of a retreat, amid surroundings that are full of the greatest charm, where you would be the queen."

"Is this one of your castles in Spain?"

"No, the realm—it is real, beautiful, and ancient—is a palace, set within a valley, on the borders of a lovely lake, under skies that are always blue, amid a people who would acknowledge you as queen. It would be a novelty—a change as wonderful as the genii of old provided. It would amuse you."

"My dear Colonel, I have no ambition to reign in a

desert island. I shall marry a good man and settle down to a humdrum life."

"I am a fairly good man," said the Colonel.

"How far did you say it was from Lima to the gold mine?" she asked.

"Did I ever say how far it was?" he replied carelessly.

"About eight days' journey."

"Then that report you received must have been forged," she said, looking at him suddenly, with a glance full of meaning.

"Forged!" he cried suddenly, starting up.

"I suppose that is the word, is it not? For evidently Mr. Elmore could not have seen the mine. You see I heard from him yesterday by wire, and he said he was then leaving for Lima."

The Colonel swore under his breath, then leant back and looked at her with an air of astonishment and admiration.

"It is wrong of him not to have told you, is it not?" she said gently. "Lord Boulders puts very great trust in Mr. Elmore. He said that if the report were not good he would have no connection with the Company, as people had warned him against it. I must tell him that Mr. Elmore cannot have seen the mine."

The Colonel's hand was firm as he stroked his moustache, but his eyes shot a look at the fair speaker that was not pleasant.

"If I were queen," she went on, with a smile, "I would appoint you my prime minister. You look so terrifying sometimes. Is it not strange that the report should have been written before the mine was examined?"

"Very strange!" he said, in muffled tones.

"You must wait now for another month, I suppose?"

"I think I can explain," he said. "You see Elmore had all the facts on board, and he must have been convinced of their genuineness, so he sent a preliminary report."

"Ah!" she said. "Now I would never have thought of that. I must tell Lord Boulders."

"If you do, Miss Dunell," he said carelessly, "the shares will not be worth waste paper, and you will ruin me."

"Oh, I should not like to make that return for your kindness."

"No, I suppose not," he said quietly. "Let me assure you that the mine is all right; but if Boulders withdrew, the people interested in the affair would suffer, whereas if nothing were said, they would recoup themselves for their trouble, and your interest would probably amount to £5,000."

"Five thousand?" she said indifferently.

"Perhaps £10,000," he said, "if all goes on as well as I think."

"Ten thousand pounds! How good it sounds! Almost as good as your romantic proposition to me to be queen of a realm palace. Where is that kingdom?"

"It is beyond the Andes," he said, bending another hard look upon her, "in a place that is known only to myself and a few others; where there is a dead city, older than any in Europe, built by the Aztecs, with magnificent spaces and shady alcoves, where the vine and the pomegranate grow about the walls."

"A dead city without population? How awful!"

"There are people there, gay and handsome, delighting in music and laughter and dancing, whose nights are spent in the warm, bright air beneath rustling palms or on the white sands of the lake."

"It is an entrancing picture. And what position do you hold there?"

"When I am there I am the chief—the cacique," said the Colonel. "No arm can reach me there, however long. Will you come?"

"As one of your guests?"

"As my guest," said the Colonel, with a bow; "and I should like to include Mr. and Mrs. Milcent. As an astronomer, Mr. Milcent would be interested in the Inca Sun Temple."

She laughed pleasantly. "I should die of fear in such a place, so remote, so isolated, where no arm, however long, can reach you. Another cruise in your yacht, if you ask me, I should enjoy. And now farewell. You don't think I should see Lord Boulders?"

"I think not," said the Colonel.

She looked thoughtfully at him for a few moments.

"Do you know, Colonel, my memory is so bad that I would like you to write down what you think I will make."

The Colonel, with a grim look, wrote down the figures.

"It is strange," he said with irony, "how forgetful women are in these matters." He felt in his pocket and the look of easy confidence came into his face. "I had almost forgotten this broker's note. That deal in American rails you asked me to carry out for you against my advice shows a loss of £100. If you will draw out a cheque, I will pay the broker to-morrow."

"A cheque!" she exclaimed. "How preposterous!"

The Colonel smiled. "It must be paid to-morrow."

"Ah," she went on calmly, "no doubt Lord Boulders will pay. Mr. Elmore never showed me these notes."

Colonel Colston took the slip of paper with a laugh. "Don't let it trouble you. Confess you bluffed me over the prospectus and the broker's note; that is, you gained your point by exposing my hand, and its weakness."

"I am afraid you needed a lesson, Colonel," she said, with a smile.

The Colonel was obliged to delay the issue of his prospectus for three weeks, and cabled to Ferdinand at Lima to stop all communication from the mine at all hazards. Then the prospectus was preceded by a number of judicious paragraphs, and by a few more judicious tips in the Auction Mart and the "Thieves' Kitchen". And when the prospectus appeared with a strikingly favourable report from Mr. Elmore, to the effect that 300,000 tons of paying ore, averaging, according to a number of samples, from one ounce to three ounces per

ton, were in sight, and that the difficulties of transport could easily be surmounted, the application for shares was great. The capital of the mine was £300,000, of which the vendors took only £75,000 in cash and £50,000 in shares. £100,000 was offered to the public for subscription in £1 shares at par, the rest being held in reserve.

The shares went to a premium of 15s. in three days, when "stags" sold out to take their profits, the "stags" being those friends of the directors who had been placed on the "ground floor" and to whom allotments had been made at par for their friendly offices. Colonel Colston himself sold 5,000 shares, not in his own name, but in the name of a "stag" to whom he had allotted that number of shares. On this selling the shares dropped from £1 15s. to £1 1s. 6d., and the Colonel demonstrated his faith in the mine by buying largely at that figure. This he did in his own name, when the shares gradually rose again during the next fortnight to £1 17s. 6d.

At this stage the Colonel worked out a scheme to squeeze the "bears". Rumours were put about that Lord Boulders intended to resign the chairmanship, and that one or two other directors had sold their shares. After this, Mr. Bragg, one of the greatest "bears" in the market, found himself at a dinner, taking in Miss Dunell. The conversation turned upon speculation, and as she confessed to knowing Colonel Colston, Mr. Bragg artfully put a few leading questions, which elicited the artless admission from her that Colonel Colston was surprised at the support that had been given to the mine, as there was practically no water on the ground for working the mills, and that fact would undoubtedly be made public within a few days, when the shares would fall. Mr. Bragg kept a close watch on the dealings, and he found that there was some selling by one of Colonel Colston's friends. On this he made his plunge and sold a heavy "bear" of £2,000 in shares. Immediately this became known the other "bears" started selling with the

result that shares went down to £1. At this stage the Colonel stepped in and began to buy.

The "bears" were caught short of shares. They had, in fact, oversold. A few thousands they picked up by paying £1 10s., but the bulk was held tightly by Colonel Colston, and the shares jumped up from £1 10s. to £2, from £2 to £3, from £3 to £5, and at £5 the unfortunate "bears" just upon settlement day were permitted to buy in.

When the settlement came round the Colonel had made, besides £75,000 in cash paid for the mine, a sum of £100,000 from his rig of the market.

By that time he had completed his arrangements for a sudden departure, but nevertheless he took the most extraordinary precautions to stave off suspicion by entering into negotiations for the purchase of a house, and by fixing appointments a long way ahead.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MULETEERS

IN the meantime Elmore, with Jack and the muleteer, had left Lima behind. They passed through a sprinkling of quintas, or suburban houses, with their flat roofs and garden walls of baked mud, and out into a country containing little but the maguey plants, the bell-mare ahead of the string of laden mules. Pedro, the muleteer, with a huge sombrero tilted rakishly on one side, his whip arm akimbo, had flung many gallant speeches at the olive-complexioned beauties of the Plaza Major, and now had a scowl and a rough word for every fellow who wished to have a little of the road for his tented waggon or saddle mule. Elmore rode behind with Jack on the saddle before him, to give the little chap a fair outlook before he had to take the place reserved for him in a roughly built two-wheeled waggon.

The atmosphere in the early morning was brilliant, and the country, bare as it was, owing to the absence of rain, of verdure, took on the richest colours, which could only be matched by the deepest autumn tints in an English forest on a bright November day, but as the sun rose the glory faded into a monotonous drab, and the air grew oppressive.

Under this heat the indolent southerners decline to work, and spend the hot hours of the morning in a long siesta which has made idleness a part of their nature. The wonder is that they have found energy enough for their many revolutions ; and no doubt were it not for the

repeated shocks of earthquake—which galvanise them at intervals into acute spasms of activity—they would long since have dropped even the taste for conspiring.

A melancholy country, with a sad-eyed, melancholy, swarthy-featured people, who are sinking into the stagnation of decay—with a fringe of foreigners, who have most of the vices of their own lands—and a mixture of Indian and Spanish to deepen the sombre tinges both of hue and of temperament.

The little band soon appeared to have the whole road to themselves, when behind them sounded the hoof-beats of a horse in rapid gallop, and Elmore, turning in his saddle, saw to his surprise that the rider was a lady. His surprise was the greater when she drew rein beside him, and he looked into the flashing eyes of Marion Colston. Never had she appeared so beautiful as now, in her well-fitting habit, her cheeks flushed with exercise, and her eyes shining from the excitement of controlling a high-spirited mustang.

"I could not let you go," she said, with a smile that showed her regular white teeth, "without one more word of farewell and advice."

"You sit here," said Jack, struggling to get down; "brother will hold you, and I'll ride your horse; it's too big for you."

She laughed and touched the spirited animal with her whip lightly, so that he pranced sideways with arching neck.

"You may ride him when you come back, little boy."

Pedro looked at her boldly, stopping his horse, his black eyes changing with the varied expressions that moved him.

"Attend to the mules!" said Elmore sharply.

Pedro looked at his master insolently, then with a gesture of contempt he shifted his sombrero, stared at Miss Colston again, and then called to the bell-mare, which had strayed from the road to nibble at a withered thorn-bush,

Miss Colston raised her eyebrows. "You see," she said, "already that man is showing his true character. I have been making investigations since I saw you last night, and it is as I thought. He is of a band of 'gauchos malas'—outlaws. I taxed Mr. Ferdinand with it, and his explanation was that the man had reformed."

"Thank you," said Elmore heartily. "I will come to an understanding with him this evening."

"Ah, but you must be careful. You may think that if you show your mastery once the matter is settled, but these men are treacherous and cunning. You must be always on your guard. I hope you are not offended with me."

"I am deeply grateful indeed."

They shook hands with a steady look into each other's eyes, and hers seemed to reveal something to him he had not expected, for though the colour left her cheeks, his reddened.

She moved her horse nearer, taming him with a pat of her gloved hand, and leaning over, kissed the little boy. "Good-bye, my little sweetheart!"

Jack looked at her for some moments while she waited for his answer. "You are sorry," he said, "I know—yes—but there is a many birds in the white mountains and I will send you one. He will fly into your window when you are sorry. You see that old mare. Well, I seen her look back at the mules when they'se tired, and she says, 'You come along, for I know a place where there's green grass and water'. Well, I'll send a bird to tell you when I'm coming back."

She kissed her fingers to him, but instead of turning back she rode forward to Pedro. The man looked at her with a smile, but a moment later he took off his hat with a respectful air at some words spoken sharply by her.

When she turned there was the trace of a frown on her forehead, but it vanished into a tender smile.

"Good-bye, little boy," she cried. She reined up and whispered: "Shall I take him on my saddle?"

"Will you go back with the lady, Jack?" said Elmore.

"When I come back from the mountains," said Jack, "I will marry my sweetheart and ride that horse; but now I will go with brother."

"May the good Lord have you in His keeping, dear little boy!" she said, and slipped over his head a slight gold chain, with balls shaped like the bolas—a chain he had often seen. "You must let him wear that always," she said, and rode on, turning once to wave her hand.

As she passed out of his sight Elmore's thoughts went back to England, and to the calm, fair, beautiful English-woman, whose beauty had thrown a spell over him, but somehow, as he recalled her face, the vision grew dim, and other eyes than hers looked out of the dream presentment, black, deep and tender, with a depth of feeling in them that the others lacked.

A halt was presently made where a few algarove trees threw a welcome shade, until at noon a cool wind blew from the sea, and the procession reformed in the wake of the bell-mare. Slowly they pushed on until the "camenchaca," the fog from the sea, came creeping up out of the waters to meet the night, and the welcome light of a "hacienda" ahead gave promise of rest and food. Shelter was found for the animals in a "corral," and an armful of alfalfa was thrown down for them, while the "haciendado" himself, a little stout man, with a pleasant face, invited the two brothers into the "patio"—the inner courtyard, inlaid with Roman tiles and adorned with ferns and a plumbago plant that crept round the supporting pillars of the inner balcony. As the darkness deepened this "patio" was like a bit of fairyland, with its square of starry sky above and unexpected swarms of fireflies appearing in a whirling dance suddenly from out the dark corners, where they had found shelter during the day. So fascinating was the place that Jack would have sat there gazing at the spiral flashes of living light in spite of his hunger, had not

his brother carried him off to the dining-room, where the strangers were courteously invited to be seated by a graceful little woman, a typical Peruvian beauty, with small features, full lips, and ears delicately curved.

It was a grand night for the little lad, and he slept until the cool, bright morning, without turning. When the journey was resumed he took with him a custard apple and a thousand adieus from the small beauty, whose mischievous eyes looked roguishly at the straight figure of the elder brother, while her red lips spoke to the young one. Then they passed from the estate, with its scattering of trees, its alfalfa beds, and maize fields, on to the pampas, and in a few hours the "patio" seemed an impossible luxury, its deep shadows, its cool floor, the little squire, and his soft-voiced, merry-eyed daughter, dream creations. There was, however, the custard apple, and Jack opened it, tasted the warm, creamy pulp, and threw it with a sigh on to the burning sand, where a mule found it and looked round wistfully for more.

There was no shadow here. On the horizon there appeared indeed only one tree, a solitary algarove, whose glossy leaves made a vain pretence of draining moisture from the arid soil. Here they halted, not because of the shade, which was not enough to shelter a walking-stick, but because of the sense of companionship which the presence of the lone tree gave. Jack crept under the cart and went to sleep, with his little brown legs in the sun, which Pedro covered up.

That handsome ruffian had quite changed his mood since Miss Colston had said to him those few hurried words. He was respectful in a sullen way to Elmore, as if his courtesy went against the grain, but to Jack he was excessively attentive. Elmore had been quick to notice the change, for he had kept a sharp watch on the muleteer's actions, with a firm resolve to speedy correction if needed, and he wondered what this new-born politeness meant.

Now, after covering the boy's legs, Pedro sought out

the shadow thrown by the mules, and stretched himself face downward on the sand.

Left to himself, Elmore took a fancy to read, and opened the saddle-bag where his books were kept. They were only two, and neither the usual "well-thumbed copies of Horace and Browning," that every man is expected to carry and does not, but two text-books on mining, as dry as the pampas. The books brought to his mind the copy of that report he had made for Ferdinand; and replacing the volumes, he sought for his leather case where he had last placed the report. The report was there, but not in his writing, and, in a flash, he remembered what Jack had said of the strange man who had moved some papers in the room at Lima. Ferdinand's report had been changed for the copy in his handwriting! What did it mean? he thought, as he knitted his brows.

The discovery lent colour to the vague suggestions of trickery which Miss Colston had thrown out. He resolved when he next saw Mr. Ferdinand, and he hoped that would be at the mine before he drew up his real report, to force an explanation from that gentleman. It was probable, he reflected, that Ferdinand had tricked him into making a copy of the report for some sinister object, and he remembered now with keen anxiety that the paper was in his own style—as if composed by him.

"They might send the document home as my own," he thought, "and if they do that they must have made their plans to prevent an instant exposure by me. There are two ways open to them—they must either square me or kill me."

He put back the leather case and drew a revolver from another package. This he loaded and slipped into his coat pocket, with a stern smile. Then he thought long over his position, and, by the light of his discovery of the changed papers, the manner of Miss Colston, even more than her words of warning, was conclusive of trickery of some sort, of which he was to be at once

the instrument and the victim. He recalled, too, the irritable manner of the Colonel, when, on the eve of departure, he had argued that Jack should be left behind.

"Why?" he asked himself, "if it was because they meditated treachery towards me, and did not like to send the boy into danger? Good God, what would become of him if anything happened to me!"

He grew white at the thought, and moved forward, as if to awaken Pedro. The muleteer turned over and stretched himself, showing his muscular throat, on which gleamed a facsimile in silver of the strange chain which Miss Colston had placed round the boy's neck.

Pedro, meeting the fixed gaze upon him, placed his hand upon his knife.

"What is that chain you wear?" said Elmore, for the moment forgetting the motive which had brought him to the man's side.

"It is worth a man's life," said Pedro, with a scowl; "and it would cost the man's life who attempted to take it."

"The little señor wears a chain."

"I know it."

"Has it any meaning for him?"

"While he wears it among the mountains, or on the pampas, or in the forest beyond the mountains—among the gipsies—or the 'gauchos malas'—or the Indians—he is safe."

"So!" said Elmore, looking keenly at the man, who had risen and stood with his hand on his knife handle. "He will not have need for it."

"How, señor?"

"I have decided to return to the town and wait until Señor Ferdinand is ready to take the journey to the mine."

"Malediction!" cried Pedro, with an ugly look. "The señor will not return."

"Why not?" asked Elmore, and his hand went in his right pocket.

A murderous look flared up in the muleteer's eyes, and there was a flash of steel as the knife leapt from the sheath.

"Pedro," called a childish voice.

Pedro did not answer. His eyes, crossed in a fixed stare, were looking into the dark tube of a revolver. The perspiration gathered on his forehead and ran down his face, which had turned a greenish-yellow.

"Pedro, I want you."

"Yes, señor," said the man in a husky voice, and his knife dropped from his grip.

There was a movement under the cart, and a little form staggered out, rubbing his eyes. Then he saw the two men, and came between them, looking from the stern, white face of his brother to the distorted features of the mulatto.

"My!" he said. "You do make me laugh."

"I said I am going back," said Elmore, in hard tones, as he pocketed his revolver.

Jack presented his knife to the mulatto, whose fingers closed convulsively on the handle.

"Put it in its pocket," said Jack calmly. "The game is finished, and you look ugly."

The man slowly pushed the knife back.

"Now," said the boy, "we will go the white mountains. Don't be frightened, brother."

Pedro tightened the packs, and the bell-mare with a shake of her head moved on a few yards.

"You see," said Pedro, suddenly breaking out into a laugh. "The little one has taken the matter into his hands. If I go back, there will be nothing for me but the prison, for the Señor Ferdinand will not listen, and he has planned to be in the mountains at the mine when all is ready for him. That is why my hand went to the knife. It is a foolish trick I learnt in other days."

"I think you understand it will not be safe to try the trick again."

"The breeze comes from the sea," said Pedro deferentially, "and it will be good travelling."

The bell-mare evidently thought so too, and moved off steadily, and the mules, persuaded that she knew best where the next feed was, followed.

Elmore permitted the mare to settle his doubts, and he rode on, after watching Jack, who sat seated before the muleteer, with another puzzle to think over—that afforded by the gold chain with the silver globes.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE MOUNTAINS

MAHINA, the bell-mare, knew her destination, and she timed to reach it at sundown. It was no roomy hacienda this time, but a square hut of dried mud blocks, set down like a rock in the desert, without a sign of green about. A pair of evil-looking, hungry-eyed, draggled-featured Gallinagos vultures were on the roof, and fluttered down in eager haste, as if bent on eating up the entire outfit.

"There is nothing here for the mules," said Elmore.

"Wait, señor," said Pedro, who had been laughing with Jack, "there is plenty of food."

"Plenty of sand, and more than enough of smell," growled Elmore in disgust.

Pedro knocked at the door with his whip handle, then kicked it with his heavy wooden stirrup, and as no one answered, he backed his mule to the door and bit the animal's ear. The effect on the door was startling—as the mule, lashing out with a squeal, shattered the wood into splinters.

Nothing came from the hut but a liberated odour of great and convincing power, which effectually routed the party, making them seek shelter at the back of the house. There the animals were tethered, all but the mare, who, at a word from Pedro, walked briskly off across the sand.

"She is seeking for food," said Pedro, with a grin; and so it was, for soon the wise animal signified her discovery by a neigh. Following the muleteer, Elmore

found himself on the brink of one of the gardens of the pampas—a deep trench some hundred yards in length—at the bottom of which was growing a rich crop of alfalfa, whose roots tapped the moisture which underlies the desert at no very great depth. Pedro sprang into the “canchone,” or gard entrench, and cut two bundles of this giant lucerne.

Having fed the animals, the three sat down to a plain meal of tinned meat, and as the hut was too unsavoury they preferred to sleep in the open, Jack alone being provided with a couch under shelter. Elmore was not thrown off his guard by Pedro's change of manner, but waiting until that worthy was asleep, shifted his resting-place. The night passed without any disturbance, and in the morning Pedro laughed when he saw what the señor had done. “I have practised that myself,” he said, “when a stranger has camped at my fire.” The muleteer chuckled as he arranged the packs. “Yes, those were great times. There was riding then, and shooting, and sometimes burning. Sometimes we chased and were chased, and then there was no time for cooking or sleeping, and we dozed in the saddle and ate the raw livers of mares like the wild Indians. I have heard it whispered that the time is again coming,” and he touched his silver bolas.

“Were you a soldier?”

“Is it possible? A soldier to fight for a few dollars a year! We were free men, ‘filibusteros’.”

“Freebooters,” echoed Elmore, with a glance of dislike; “and is this,” pointing to the gold chain on Jack's neck, “the sign of the band?”

“Ah, señor, if you love the little one you will not say a word against that token. But it is time; and if we hasten, to-night we come to a rancho where there are trees, and water, and the chance of a fire, without which I say there can be no comfort in eating, or in sleeping, or in talking. Hasta! Mahina!”

As they kept slowly on over the burning pampas, with

a cloudless sky above, the mirage quivering ahead gave illusive promises of lakes that were of more than earthly beauty, so blue, so calm, with green sloping banks, dotted with stately trees.

Jack wondered at them, peopled them with fairies, and they helped him through the almost insupportable heat of the morning.

"Lakes of the dead!" said Pedro. "Once the old people before the Spaniards lived on the shores of those lakes, and were happy. But when the Spaniards came to rob and slay, the sun god of the Incas grew hot with anger, and the lakes dried under his burning glance."

But beyond the pampas, and giving solid promise of cooler days and better living, with the music of running water, towered the Andes, stepping out of the hazy blue which had softened their outlines into snow-topped heights and long rugged spurs, which sloped down to the plain, enclosing dark ravines and wide valleys dotted with houses. Mahina, the mare, scenting afar off the rich smell of the maize fields, stepped out briskly, with her ears pricked, and in the late afternoon they rounded the foot of the first spur and turned into a valley which stretched miles before them up and up to a distant ridge, beyond which gleamed the dazzling summit of Chuquibamba, loftiest of the Cordillera peaks. As they entered the valley a puff of sweet, earth-scented air, just sharpened with a touch of cold, smote them as with a magic touch, so that they felt compelled to sing, and even the mare stopped a minute to neigh.

Soon they halted at a ranch, where gentle peones in wide white linen breeches saluted them as if they had been friends, and the slow-moving "haciendado," with the courteous dignity that is the sole legacy of the Spaniard, bade them welcome to his house, and his larder, his horses, his cattle, and his fruit. It was a pleasant fiction, this, which did not repudiate payment by the guests, but it was grateful nevertheless.

The next was a day of excitement, as they slowly

threaded the wide valley, always getting higher, pausing at times to look back over the winding road, over the brown pampas, across which the sea fog was creeping to the hazy blue of the Pacific, which seemed to blend with the lower arch of the sky. Then they crossed the ridge higher up, and descended into a fertile valley whose sides were scarred with the burrowings of countless prospectors in search of gold. Strings of mules laden with ore wound down narrow paths from loftier heights, to where some "fabrique" threw out evidence, in its smoky banner, of smelting. Then for the two following days they passed over a lofty plateau, enclosed by the lateral ridges, which connect the main chains of the Cordilleras, into more valleys gradually getting out of the range of the inhabited region, until they entered the vast and forbidding ravines of the eastern chain. Here the appalling silence was at intervals broken by the shrill neigh of the sentinel guanaco, while the clear air overhead was cleaved by the mighty condor, sailing on outstretched wings, that seldom seemed to move, in widening circle on circle. Here they came upon a party of Bolivian gipsies resting by a trickling stream: squat, thick-set people, with heavy faces. They gave a brief greeting and sat silent, taking note of the strange travellers in that inhospitable region, of the bold muleteer, the straight-limbed, self-reliant Englishman, and the little boy who smiled at them pleasantly.

"Thieves!" said Pedro, with a virtuous indignation. "Thieves and cut-throats! To-night we must sleep with one eye open."

At the summit of the pass there stood a small, square, single-roomed hut of stone, the first relic of the Aztecs they had seen—an eloquent reminder of the traffic that had once passed over this desolate region, under the intelligent rule of a submerged race, which, though living under a ruling class, had found a working substitute for socialism.

"Why is this place built?" asked Pedro.

"As a resting-place for travellers, in the old days before the Spaniards," suggested Elmore.

"And who would travel here, señor, when there is neither food nor drink? No, no, it was here the priest stood while he studied the rising sun, and watched where the first sunbeam struck against the mountain side for sign of hidden gold. Where you find such a hut, near by are the richest mines. We are now near the mine for which we are bound, and this is the sign of its presence. Many have sought for it, but none found, until Don Ferdinando, who has studied the old religion, and is of the old race by his mother's side, abode here seven nights and on the eighth morning took the line of the sun striking over yonder mountain."

"Are you speaking of Mr. Ferdinand?"

"The same, señor."

"I did not think he was of Indian blood."

"Indian! No more Indian than the jaguar is of the monkey race. The Indians were savages when his forefathers built the great cities and carried water across the pampas—and they are savages yet. Don Ferdinando is of the great house; and there was but one who was nearer than he to the Incas, and that was a woman whose beauty was like that of the moon on a still night, so that it made one good to look at her. She married one of your race, a man of great courage, and had two children; one of them, a boy, she took when she was put away. The other, a girl, stayed with the father."

"Why was she put away, as you call it?"

"Who knows?" said Pedro, with a shrug, "but Don Ferdinando himself. The Englishman was hard and quick to judge. It is said a story was told him against his wife's honour. They say further the story was a lie, but the Englishman gave orders that she and her boy were to be shot. But no man of the band would shoot a descendant of the Incas for fear lest the sun god should turn him to ashes. They led her with her babe into the forest, and they told the Englishman they were dead."

After that it was bad to hear him laugh, for he laughed only when others suffered."

"And what became of the woman?"

"The forest is not a safe place for a strong man. For a woman, ah! when the forest gives up its secrets we will know."

"Do you know the Englishman's name?"

"What does it signify?" said Pedro, with a cunning glance, "since he, too, is dead. They knew him well in Peru, in Ecuador, and in Brazil, and I have heard that the band he led will gather again. I hope so. They were great days when the filibusteros rode out—good pay, good fighting, and good feasting at the fandango, with the pretty girls."

They went on, now descending a long valley, now threading a ravine, in surroundings that grew more sterile until they came to a vast basin of rock and stone, rimmed with terrific precipices, stern, forbidding, grey, and silent.

"What place is this?" asked Elmore, with a sinking heart.

"They call it Despoblado—the place of Desolation!"

CHAPTER X

DESPOBLADO

TRULY it was the place of Desolation.

There was not within sight one solitary tree, or blade of grass, or trace of moisture—nothing but loose stones and grim walls of solid rock, pierced at intervals by yawning ravines which opened up other vistas of desolation.

"My God!" said Elmore, "we cannot live here."

"Yet this is the place."

"But there is no food for the mules—no water."

"The animals will be driven farther, and food and water will be brought."

"Is this a trick?" continued Elmore sternly; "I see no trace of a mine or of works."

"The mine is in the third quexrala on the left," pointing to a narrow opening. "Those who seek gold in the Cordilleras must expect a hard couch—but, after all, it is not my business, which ceases when the mules are unladed. If the señor is afraid of the hardships, he should have said so before leaving the coast."

Elmore pointed at Jack, who was looking up at the frowning heights with a glance of fear.

"Ay, it is hard for the little one," said Pedro. "He will find no playmate here, no tree, nor bird, nor living thing, but the miners, and they are men of few words. It will be hard for Señor Jack."

"It will kill him," said Elmore, with a groan, "and I have fed him with pictures of a place of beauty. We must not tell him."

"The señor knows best. He would bring the little one with him, though those who had been here warned him of the risk. Let him go with me to the place where the mules are to be corralled."

"He will stay with me," said Elmore, with a glance of distrust at him.

"He will stay and it will be his grave," Pedro muttered.

They passed on to the ravine, wherein the mine was said to be, and discovered a few "toldos"—roughly made huts, with a mound of ore near the mouth of a shaft. There was no machinery whatever, not even winding gear; but the miners themselves carried the ore up in baskets on their backs, over ladders. As the party arrived a man emerged, shot out the contents of his basket, and sank down exhausted, the sweat pouring from his face. His forehead was furrowed with the deep lines of toil, his cheeks and his eyes dulled by over-exertion. Pedro greeted him, and the man looked at the party, without surprise or without interest.

"He has got the spirit of the Des poblado in his bones," said Pedro, with a grin at Elmore; "the accursed stillness has chained his tongue as it will mine, if I remain," and he turned to unloose the mules.

Jack crept up closer to his brother, and looked around, with a timid air.

Elmore stared at the miner, at the yawning hole, and tightened his grasp on the little hand.

"Put those things back on the mules," he said; "I will not remain here. It is impossible to work a mine in a place without water, and to which no machinery could be brought."

"This is no business of mine, señor, but surely you will wait until Don Ferdinando arrives, which should be in three days, and say what you think to him."

Pedro continued calmly with his work, while Elmore stood reflecting in a fever of uncertainty. He had contracted to report on the mine, and clearly it was his duty to remain.

"I will return in three days," said Pedro. "Also, Señor Jack, I will bring you a green bird with a red beak and a blue tail."

The bell-mare tossed her head and stepped off briskly down the ravine, the mules, now relieved of their burdens, following quickly, and Pedro sitting astride one of them, bade them a lively adieu. The miner stared after the mules, stared silently at the two brothers, gave way to another man, who emerged panting from the shaft, and with a last look went slowly down. The new man swept the sweat from his eyes with his grimy hand, and flung himself on the stones to stare with his dulled eyes, also in silence.

"I'm frightened!" said Jack, with a quiver.

"It's all right, Jack," said Elmore, with a forced smile. "Let us put up the tent, and make some tea for these poor men, who are working so hard, and then, after a short time, we will go down to the green valley."

As the night closed in, the miners as they came up remained until there were five of them in all, who gathered round the little spirit stove and drank maté, while Elmore sang to break the awful silence. Gradually they fell asleep where they sat, and in the morning, with a supply of candles, they went down out of sight to begin their toil anew. Elmore would have gone down too; but Jack was terrified at the bare idea of being left alone with the brooding stillness. That night the little fellow shrieked in his sleep at some awful terror which his imagination had been working upon, and the next day he was in a distressing state of nervous excitement.

"This will not do," said Elmore; "shall I take you to the mules and Pedro?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

Saying a word in the patois to the silent miner who chanced to be outside the shaft, recovering his strength, by way of explanation, Elmore hoisted Jack to his shoulder, and set off on the trail taken by the mules. He feared that Pedro had gone right away, but after a

long and weary tramp he came upon the muleteer in a little valley, showing signs of cultivation. Pedro appeared to be expecting them, for he came to meet them, holding in his hand a green parrot, which stepped to Jack's shoulder and rubbed its beak against his cheek. The little fellow let go his brother's hand, and caught fast hold of Pedro's finger. Even when Elmore turned away, Jack was so excited at the sudden change from the terrors of the silent ravine to this pleasant valley, with noisy birds, that he scarcely noticed his brother's departure. Elmore sighed and went his lonely way with a feeling of depression at his heart and a presentiment of evil that he could not shake off.

It was night when he got back, and the miners were seated about the door of his little hut. There was a look of expectation on their drawn faces, and one of them placed a guitar in his hands. He returned it with a smile, saying he could not play, and the man struck up a monotonous tune, accompanied by a weird song, while the others smoked and stared solemnly at the flickering light of the lamp, occasionally joining in the refrain, with low, melancholy voices. When they ceased an echo came from the vast basin, an echo that was more mournful than any sound he had heard, and the men shuddered and crossed themselves as they heard.

"It mocks us!" said the player; "always it mocks us!" And he laid the guitar aside.

In the morning Elmore descended the shaft. Before doing so, he had formed his opinion that it would be impossible to work a property in such a place, inaccessible to heavy machinery, even if the reef were very good; and the briefest inspection of the workings proved to him that the reef was poor. Sufficient work had been done in a rough way by the miners to disclose the reef, and he found it, by the dim lights used, thin and pyritic. He had no difficulty in persuading himself now that there had been foul play, and the idea that had once before entered his mind returned again, namely, that the copy

of the report he had innocently made would be sent to London, to be there circulated as a genuine document.

This idea filled him with horror. The publication of such an absolutely false statement would for ever ruin his reputation, and make him the unconscious author of widespread suffering and ruin to numberless shareholders who would be deceived into parting with their money. What steps could he take to counteract the effect of that report? Clearly there was only one course open to him, and he bitterly regretted that he had not turned back when on the pampas he first discovered that the documents had been changed. He must return to the coast and cable to the Committee of the Stock Exchange.

But he soon found that this plan was not to be so easily realised. When the valley opened up to him he could see no trace of either Pedro or the mules. His glance went swiftly down the sides of the valley and along its length, without detecting a single living object. That, however, did not discourage him. It was probable Pedro had pushed on to another grazing ground, and he went on through the valley to climb another ridge beyond in the expectation of finding those he sought. But he reached the ridge to find only another barren ravine, and when he pushed through that he found before him a wilderness of wild and broken country, without a track or sign of man's presence.

Then he thought not of his own honour, nor of Pedro, but of his little brother; and a cry broke from his lips. Turning, he went swiftly back to the mine, in a state of terrible anxiety, half hoping that he had missed Pedro on the way, but fearing he knew not what.

It was late when he got back. He had been walking for hours without food, and his face was haggard, but he could have gone on all through the night, if the morning would have brought him to the side of his little Jack.

"Where is Pedro?" he cried fiercely, as he came up to the wearied miners who sat drinking maté.

They looked at him mildly without speaking, but a stranger rose and held a bundle of letters to the engineer.

"I have been waiting for the señor," said he, "having travelled fast from the coast and will return with the answer."

"Where is Pedro?" continued Elmore, feeling that he would like to grasp one of these silent men by the throat. "Where is the muleteer? He has left the valley where he went with the mules."

The miners smiled deprecatingly because of their ignorance of the señor's speech, and the stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps," he said gruffly, "the letters will explain."

Elmore looked at the packet in his hand with a frown, and then tore one of them open with feverish impatience, reserving the third, which bore the London postmark, and the address of which was in a well-known writing. The first letter he read was from Mr. Ferdinand. It was short and to the point:—

"DEAR ELMORE,—I am sorry I cannot meet you at the mine whose great possibilities you have no doubt already fully informed yourself upon. I have, however, ventured to anticipate your favourable report, and have despatched the document you were good enough to draw up.

"There is, I think, no necessity for you to continue your labour of inspection, but at the same time it occurs to me that it would be undesirable for you either to return to London or to the coast of Peru. Allow me to suggest that Brazil offers very fair openings to engineers of ability, and if you select that country as a field for your energies I would be pleased to pack you over the Cordilleras to a discreet friend of mine.

"I am certain, my friend, that the air of the mountains, as well as the mists of the coast, are decidedly unhealthy.

"Yours sincerely, JUAN FERDINAND."

The other letter was from Miss Colston. It ran:—

“DEAR MR. ELMORE,—Mr. Ferdinand has told me that he has offered you certain advice for the safety of yourself and the dear little brother. I earnestly implore you to adopt his proposal. If you do not you will place yourself in enmity to men who have the power as well as the will to remove any obstacle. If not for your sake, then for the sake of little Jack, and for my happiness, seize the one chance of escape that is offered.

“I would not dare urge you to any course that is opposed to your pride or sense of honour if I were not too well convinced that the danger is real.

“Your friend, MARION COLSTON.”

Elmore crunched the letters in his hand and turned to the messenger, a dark-browed, powerful man, who stood keenly attentive.

“What is the message you received from your master?” he asked.

“My orders were to take you over the mountains to the hacienda on the plains of Brazil, several days’ march.”

“To take me alone?”

“It was said there was a boy with you.”

“Very well,” said Elmore, “bring me the boy and I will give you my answer.”

The messenger smiled. “How can I find the boy?”

“Ask these men. They talked with Pedro when he came, and before he left with the mules. They will know where he is gone.”

The man talked with the miners, while Elmore glanced feverishly from one to the other as slowly they answered.

“Well?” he said impatiently.

“They say there is another valley two days’ march where there is a village, and that Pedro is no doubt there.”

"Let us go," said Elmore.

"In the early morning, when my mules have rested, and not till then, and only then if the señor tells me now that he consents to journey into Brazil, for if not——"

"Well, if not?"

"If not," said the man significantly, "it would be waste of time to search for the little one, for they will keep him as surety."

Elmore looked at the man with horror, as he comprehended his meaning. "Hold him as surety!" he gasped.

CHAPTER XI

PURSUIT

"WHAT was he to do?"

That was the question, ever repeated but never answered, that tortured Elmore through the night. If he had only been alone he would not have hesitated. If there had been no little frail child dependent on him he would have defied his enemies, but the thought that Jack was in their hands wrung his heart, the more so because he thought he had been to blame in letting the boy out of his sight. He was unnerved, too, at the villainy which stooped to make an instrument for its designs out of a weak child, and he could think of nothing but the risk to the boy's life.

As he sat eating his heart out, he thought suddenly of the third letter he had received, and opened it feverishly, in the hope that he might from it receive some guidance. It was from Miss Dunell, the woman he loved. But there was no divine message in the formal sentences, not even an expression of womanly sympathy.

"DEAR MR. ELMORE,—Colonel Colston has informed me, much to my surprise and annoyance, that you incurred a liability on my behalf in connection with those share transactions you persuaded me to enter into. I really do think it was very thoughtless of you to have run the risk you did, and I should be more displeased if I were not aware that you acted with the best intention. I may tell

you that I have interested Colonel Colston in your career, and he has assured me that if you carry out the mission he has entrusted to you to his satisfaction, you will not regret it. Very much, he tells me, depends on the result of your journey, and indeed you will, I am sure, be delighted to learn, after your unfortunate efforts on the Exchange, that I will greatly benefit if the Company is a success. I do hope, therefore, that you will send back a very favourable account of the mine, for everything depends on that, as your name has great weight with the 'Market'. You should be very proud of that, and I am sure you will do nothing to disappoint your friends.

"If the mine is a success I may see you earlier than you think, as Colonel Colston would then purchase a yacht with the view of cruising with a party of friends to Peru.

"You must forgive me for writing about nothing but this horrid mine, but you cannot believe how excited we all are about it.

"Yours sincerely, BEATRICE DUNELL."

"P.S.—I have not forgotten what you said when I last saw you. You know how to please me, I am sure."

"My God!" said Elmore, tearing the letter into fragments, "even she is with them."

This was the advice that was given him by Miss Colston—to do what he was asked by his employers, to sacrifice his honour, to allow a lie to go forth in his name. His honour! Good heavens! What was his honour to him compared with the safety of his little Jack! His duty was not to his honour, but to the little life that had been left in his charge. He would agree to the terms offered by Mr. Ferdinand.

He felt calmer now that he had arrived at this conclu-

sion, and he picked up the fragments of the letter that he had torn in his anger and despair. He tried to piece them together, but it was in vain, and it was in vain he tried also to recall the shattered image of his idol. She had left him nothing but the memory of her beauty, and that had grown dim, to be finally blurred by the sordid touch of her selfishness. He found the other letter that he had crumpled, and he smoothed it out, to read again the cry in it that came straight from a woman's warm heart.

"If not for your sake, then for the sake of little Jack and my happiness." He liked that.

If he had been alone, yes—but as he was not, he would leave his honour and his love, and start a new life under a new name on the Sierras of Brazil.

He went out into the Valley of Desolation to think over his resolution, and in the awful silence of the place he fought the battle again between his honour and his kinship. And in the lonely place the clear, grave eyes of the little brother seemed to look into his, with the weird, wan smile on the small mouth.

"My God," he cried, "it is hard!" And the morning found him with haggard cheeks and blood-shot eyes, for he had passed the night without sleep. And now that he had made up his mind there was no comfort for him, no consolation in the thought that he had decided to do what was just and right, and only a feeling of intense and bitter hatred of those who had fooled him, coupled with a haunting fear for the safety of his brother.

The messenger met him as he came wearily back to the squalid camp.

"The señor said he would give me his answer."

"I will give your master his answer when I meet him," was the stern reply.

"And the señor will not take the advice of his friends and go into the Sierras?"

Elmore did not reply, but he kept his gaze fixed steadily on the other's smouldering dark eyes.

"Ah, well, it is no business of mine," said the man, with a shrug of his shoulders under his poncho, "but for myself I would not choose the Cordilleras for a grave."

"Speak out plainly," said Elmore quietly.

"I have nothing to say," said the man surlily, "and I know nothing except this, that what Don Ferdinand says he will do that he will do. I have given my message, and I will take back your reply."

Elmore reflected that he would have a clear fortnight before Ferdinand could take any measure against him, and in that time he might find Jack and make his way to the coast.

"But," said the messenger, as if he had read these thoughts, "the work has begun. I will tell you that much for the sake of one who thinks well of you. Her message to you in case you were headstrong was this—to be on your guard night and day."

"You came alone," said Elmore. "Why should I not make you remain with me?"

The man laughed, then pointed to the miners who were lounging near.

"These men are in Don Ferdinando's service. Some have been of his band. It is hopeless, señor. Suppose you fell down the mine in the night. They could say it was an accident, eh?—and it would be so easy."

Elmore dropped his hands. For a moment he was unnerved, for a glance at the man's face showed that he was not speaking idly.

One of the miners called out, and the man replied.

"You see," he said, "they want to know what we talk of. There is one word more I can say. Go from this place at once, whatever else you do after. I will tell them that you have gone to Pedro and the little brother. Take with you what you can carry and go. If they follow it will not be for an hour, for they have not breakfasted, and they know you cannot evade them."

"How do I know you are not giving me bad advice?"

"The señor must judge for himself," said the man, and turned to the fire.

Elmore followed, and while the miners listened to the messenger he entered the tent. No one paid any attention to his movements, and when he had pocketed a few most necessary articles, he strolled away without hindrance down the ravine in the direction Pedro had taken. When he cleared the ravine he increased his pace, keeping on until he had entered the valley where he had lost trace of Jack. There were two ravines leading from the valley; one of these he had entered the previous day, and he now examined the mouth of the second for trace of the mules. To his relief he found a sign, and then, being nearly famished and exhausted from want of sleep, he sat down to rest, keeping at the same time a watch on the track he had followed. If he were pursued, he would know that what the messenger had told him was true. If, however, no one followed, he would be relieved of all present sense of danger.

He was not long left in doubt, for very soon after he had sat down he saw small figures in motion at the far end of the valley, taking form rapidly in the clear air until he made out five men. They came on fast without a pause, and when they were about a mile distant he thought it advisable to move, without waiting to see whether they were really in pursuit of him, and, keeping in the shade of the precipice, plunged into the gloomy defile which narrowed down to a passage hemmed in by towering heights of rock. To escape a mountain stream, flowing amid huge boulders, he was forced to a ledge having the appearance of a track. As he followed this it gradually took him above the level of the stream till there was a formidable depth below him. The ledge itself, too, grew narrower, so that it was dangerous to walk quickly, and he resolved not to go farther, but to wait and see if he were followed. If not, he would turn back, as it was clear Pedro could not have taken that route with the mules.

There was, however, to be no turning back. The men, whatever their intentions, were on his track, and very soon two of them appeared on the right, on the very ledge he had taken.

He recognised in one of them a man from the mine. The other, who was ahead, he did not recognise, but he saw the muzzle of a carbine projecting below his poncho, and at the sight he looked quickly along the ledge to his left to see whether he could find shelter. Some twenty yards farther, the ledge in a narrow riband ran round a projecting rock, and he saw that if he could get round he could defend himself better in case of attack. He acted at once, not even turning when he heard a sharp exclamation from the men, but when he was within a few yards of the rock, which promised so safe a shelter, he halted with dismay at the sight of a brown hand on the edge of the rock, followed by a foot on the ledge. It flashed on him that he was caught in a trap, and as he stood back flat against the wall he whipped out his revolver, and glanced at the two men, well knowing that the new-comer could not be in a position to use a weapon for some seconds. He saw the leading man with his carbine levelled, and at once fired from his hip. The shot unnerved the fellow, and his bullet struck the rock high up and went singing into the valley beyond. He fired again, more to frighten his assailant than in the hope of wounding, and faced his new foe whose face was now peeping round the buttress on his left. At a glance he saw to his intense relief that this new-comer was at any rate not after him. The face expressed nothing but astonishment, and a certain haughty fierceness at the startling reception his appearance had apparently met with.

"They are attacking me!" shouted Elmore to him.

The new-comer glanced from Elmore to the two men, then his eyes suddenly blazed with fury, and with a curse he swung round the rock and stepped on to the ledge. His sudden appearance filled the two men with evident terror.

"El Demonio!" they both yelled, and while Elmore stood in a state of strained expectancy, not knowing what would happen next, they turned and ran like antelopes along the ledge, while the stranger, after an aimless shot after them from a rifle, faced Elmore.

He saw the face of a young man, of singular power, stern, but not unfriendly, with something of the eagle in the hooked nose and in the keen, bold eyes. In figure he was short, with broad shoulders and deep chest; his complexion was dark. He wore in his ears large rings of silver, round his neck a bright handkerchief, his poncho was striped red and white. He looked indeed like a native, but there was something strange in his appearance that puzzled Elmore as he took in these details of his dress and features. He saw it when the stranger stood before him. His eyes, instead of being black to match his complexion and his crow-black hair, were grey, and there was a mingled air of dignity and command that he had certainly not seen in any peon or gaucho. They stood a moment taking silent stock of each other, then Elmore thanked him.

"I owe my life to you."

The young man stepped back with a frown.

"You are English," he said, with a look of repulsion, and in deep guttural tones.

"Yes, let us shake hands."

"No, no, never!" said the other harshly.

CHAPTER XII

EL DEMONIO

"IF you will not shake hands will you let me pass?"

The stranger made room by standing back, but Elmore hesitated a moment, for the slightest touch would send him over the edge on to the rocks far below.

The other noticed the hesitation and smiled contemptuously.

"Do you fear?" he said.

"I have reason," said Elmore, with bitter resentment, as he moved up, "to fear the treachery of your race."

"My race!" cried the other with suppressed scorn. "I am not kin to those dogs. Stay!" he continued, as Elmore was moving on, "in what way have they been treacherous? I know their ways and may give you counsel."

"In what way? In every way! They lured me into these mountains; they have given me the choice between dishonour and death; and they have taken from me my little brother." And Elmore, growing furious with the sudden recollection of his trouble, after his recent excitement clenched his fist.

"And what wrong had you done them?"

"Wrong! I refused to fall in with their schemes of robbery."

"Can you tell me the name of one of them?" said the other. "I know many of these people, and they have no cause to love me."

"Mr. Ferdinand, or Don Ferdinand, as he is called. A bigger scoundrel there cannot be, unless it is his partner."

"I will shake hands on that," said the other with energy, and as their hands met in a firm grip, they looked each other in the eyes with a more friendly interest.

"This is better," said Elmore, "than quarrelling, because I am an Englishman. Can you add to your kindness by telling me what I should do?"

"First let us make ourselves secure from attack in case these ladrones return." And leading the way along the path he had come, he went round the projecting rock, on to a platform in a cleft that had been made by the falling away of the rock. "Now tell me your story."

Elmore explained how he came to report on the mine, how Pedro had left with the mules and Jack, how the mine proved to be utterly worthless, and how he had been told to save himself by leaving for La Plata.

"You said this Ferdinand had a partner. Was he also a bastard Spaniard?"

"He remained in London to float the company. I am ashamed to say he is an Englishman — Colonel Colston."

"I know no one of that name," said the stranger musingly.

"What would you advise me?"

"If it were any use, I would advise you to leave the country."

"That, of course, I cannot do without my brother."

"It seems to me, then, that your position is hopeless. You are alone, unarmed, and without provisions in a country you know nothing of, and tracked by men who are familiar with every ravine."

"I know that myself," said Elmore, with a gesture of impatience.

"There is only one thing more I can suggest," added the other slowly, "and that is equally dangerous. It is that you should join me."

"I cannot ask you to share in my quarrel," said Elmore, with a flush.

"Your quarrel is but a day old; mine has existed since I could use a knife. You saw how those men run. They fear me and the vendetta I swore by the God of my mother, fifteen years ago, against a man of your race, against this Ferdinand, and every member of their accursed band."

"And who are you?" said Elmore, impressed deeply by the other's dark and vengeful look.

"Who am I?" said the stranger, with a look of pride, "I am a child of the Sun—the last of the Aztecs."

"You!" exclaimed Elmore, remembering the tale told him by Pedro.

"Well," the stranger continued, without noticing Elmore's emotion, "will you join me, knowing that my hand is against the enemies of my people, and first of all against those who have wronged you, but have done me a greater wrong?"

"If you help me to recover my brother."

"And also if you help me against my foes, and are true to me while we are together?"

Elmore nodded.

"Let us swear, then, in my way." Drawing his knife he caught Elmore's wrist in a grasp of iron and made a gash which drew blood. Then he cut his own arm, and bringing the wounds together let their blood mingle. "I swear," he said solemnly, "by the gods of my people to be true to you."

"Now tell me your name, and how it is you speak English so well."

"Some call me El Demonio, and my mother called me Tupac. I am alone—a cacique without a band, the head of a race without a people."

"I will call you Cacique, then," and the chief acknowledged the courtesy with a gesture of pride. "My name is Elmore. And your English—where did you learn that?"

"A few words from my mother," and the Cacique lifted his broad sombrero while he muttered a few words as if in prayer. "The rest I learnt from travellers—not

because I loved the language, but because—well, what does it matter why? Now let us go, lest we be caught in a trap.”

He led the way along the ledge at a pace which somewhat tried Elmore's nerve, for the way was narrow and a false step would have been fatal. Below was the thin white thread of the torrent, so far that not a murmur of its wild music reached their ears.

Suddenly the Cacique broke in upon his dreams, and brought him back with a wrench to the stern realities.

“Have you any money with you?”

“Only about fifty pounds.”

“They must have been sure of taking you when they liked, to have permitted you to go off with so much. I have a little gold that I mined at Huanuco, about seventy libra, and if we put the two together there will be sufficient to provide us with horses, and yourself with a rifle and ammunition.”

“What do we want with horses? They are of no use in the mountains.”

“In the mountains, true. But if I am not mistaken our work lies beyond the Cordilleras, on the Plata and in the forest. I have been thinking the matter over, and my experience is that when these men have achieved a greater villainy they make for their fastnesses. Be sure of this, when Pedro hears of your escape he will make for the Miramon River with the little boy. That way leads to their retreat; and I heard but yesterday from a party of Bolivian gipsies that the band was about to assemble at its old haunts.”

“Ah! Pedro said something to me about a band of filibusters. But you forget that Pedro is but a servant, and he will not act without instructions.”

“Depend upon it, he has received those instructions beforehand, for your Señor Ferdinand is one who calculates all the chances. You may be certain that he planned to capture your brother in order to force you to accept his proposals, and in the event of your refusal and

escape, he would have so contrived that you would not, even if you had the opportunity, return to the coast. How better could he so contrive than by tempting you farther and farther from the coast in pursuit of the child?"

"I hope you are wrong."

"Rather hope that I am right, if you love the child. For if it is not as I say, there is only one thing left, and that is that they will get rid of him—yes, kill him."

"Let us find Pedro," cried Elmore. "He cannot yet have left the mountains."

"If I can lead you safely away from him I will do better. Do you think," he continued, turning with a flash in his singular eyes, "that I should want any urging if I thought I could seize him? Where are your arms? Just now it seemed to me that you required help only from two men, and one of them unarmed. No, my brother, if you work with me I must lead."

Elmore's face flushed. An angry light blazed in his eyes, and, for a moment, the hot desire to quarrel was upon him. The Cacique saw the gathering storm, and, placing his rifle against the rock, stood with steady eyes.

"Have you forgotten your oath so soon?" he said slowly. "If so, let us part in peace."

"I have not forgotten," cried Elmore, "but I must do something, I cannot wait."

"You cannot wait! For twenty years I have waited with a sense of wrong ever present, that never ceases to torture, and grows with the years. I can wait, but in the end I will repay them."

"But," said Elmore, with a passionate despair that contrasted with the deadly calmness of his companion, "they may get away while we wait—they may escape."

"Where they go I can follow, for I have lived with the Indians of the forest and with the gauchos of the plains, and they can track anything that walks. I say let them go, for if you went to them now they would, being warned, be on guard. But understand, if I work with you I claim to lead."

Elmore silently nodded his assent, and once again they kept on. They were now at a dizzy height, and presently caught the blast that came off a snowy peak over the ridge before them, and they were obliged to stoop their heads while keeping close to the wall. Presently they reached the ridge itself, and took shelter behind a rock to recover their wind. Beyond was another rock-strewn valley, dark and inhospitable. Elmore felt a great difficulty in breathing, but on masticating some coca leaves given by his friend, he found relief.

"We must pass through that valley before night, to a gipsy camp, where we shall be sure of food and shelter.

"What lucky chance brought you here?"

"Tell me," said the Cacique, "have you heard any legends of the hidden wealth of the Incas?"

"No, but I have seen some of the ancient workings where they mined for gold. I thought the Spaniards had taken all the wealth of the Incas."

"A great store they took by a trick, but not all. The rest is hidden, and I was going to the Despoblado, where is one of the old houses, when I met you. For many years I have searched for the marks of my race, and the Despoblado is one that I had not visited."

"There are no old workings near there, and if treasure was hidden, would it not be near the mines?"

"We are not searching for treasure," said the Cacique brusquely.

That night they came to a gipsy camp, a few toldos (huts), made out of guanaco skins, and after a single meal of rice they sat by the fire, when one of the squat, broad-faced men, after an inquiring look at Elmore, said a few words to the Cacique.

"He tells me," said the latter, turning to Elmore, "that he has seen you before; and that the little boy who was then with you has passed with Pedro and three other men this afternoon."

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE PAMPAS

BEFORE sunrise, in the biting cold, in darkness that was profound, Elmore was aroused to take a cup of maté and a tasteless dish of cold rice, a very unsatisfactory preparation for a hard day's work. The Cacique drew his brilliant coloured poncho round his shoulders, and then stepped out through the driving mist, over rocks slippery with wet. As the light increased the mist turned to rain, and gradually vegetation replaced the stones and rocks, while the constant clamour of parrots came through the heavy air from unseen woods. Elmore complained of the sudden change from the dry, cold air to the soaking rain.

For several hours they struggled on, to emerge at last in a clearing where stood a collection of toldos, with a corral near, and an acre or so of garden land. As they emerged, the gipsy who had left them the previous night, came out to meet them, and spoke a few words to the Cacique.

"He says that Pedro has gone north towards the headwaters of the River Miramon. He was travelling fast, and was joined by two of his other men, one of them being an officer of the filibusteros. Have you a libra for the man?"

Elmore took out a sovereign, which the gipsy received with glittering eyes. Then with his habitual stolid expression he drew his poncho around him and went back to his camp in the mountain.

"Now," said the Cacique, after a moment's thought, "I will tell you my plan. There is a man here whom I can trust. For ten libra he will do what I want, and that is to follow Pedro until he is certain of his destination, and then meet us on the plain at a spot he knows between the Rivers Miramon and Huallaga."

A week later the two sworn friends reached a hacienda at the foot of the mountain, where they arranged with the gaucho owner for two mustangs and their fittings, including lassos. Elmore fitted himself out as a gaucho, with the coloured poncho (a blanket with a slit in the middle), wide fringed trousers, huge spurs, wide sombrero bound round with a gay strip, and a blazing red belt. He carried a Winchester repeating rifle with two bandoliers, and a hunting knife. His companion was similarly equipped, and sat his saddle with the ease of the most skilled horsemen in the world—the gauchos of the plains.

"Now we are all right," he said, as he noted with satisfaction that Elmore had perfect control of his half-tamed steed.

"Not yet," said Elmore grimly. "I shall not feel satisfied till I have the little brother on the saddle before me."

"And our enemies dead! It is long now since I killed one, and the last fell over in the forest at a huaca, where the devil was rifling the graves of the dead for wealth."

"I don't like to hear that talk."

"Why not?" asked the chief haughtily.

"It is fiendish to talk of killing a man in cold blood, and I am sure from what you have done for me that you do yourself an injustice."

"You remember," said the other, with a gloomy look, "they called me 'El Demonio' up there in the mountain. Be sure they had cause, and as for killing a man who would kill you if you did not strike first, I see nothing to fret about. You yourself have a bitter feud with these men. Will you content yourself with a few

reproaches when you meet?" and the Cacique looked with a sarcastic smile at Elmore.

"I shall tell them my opinion in a few straight words, and lay the case before the authorities when I have recovered my brother."

The Cacique laughed, and, leaning over, he tapped the barrel of Elmore's rifle. "That," he said, "is the argument you will use, just as you used your revolver up there. Come! let us say what we mean, and not what we wish. When a man hunts the jaguar he does not prepare to deal with a sheep, and when you go on the track of the filibusteros, you must be ready to shoot first. That is the wisdom of the plains and the law of the forest; for the man who stops to talk gives his enemy an opening. I was young when I learnt that, and it was well for me, else I had been slain when I met my first trial."

Presently the Cacique placed his hand on Elmore's arm, and pointed to where a clump of "cana brava" grew round a small laguna.

"What is it?" said Elmore.

"A magnificent chance for a chase," he said, unhitching the bolas from his saddle-horn and trying the swing of it. "Not often does one get an opportunity like this, with the course of a full mile to the next cover. The lasso, however is no use, and you have no bolas. Take mine."

"No, thanks. I would swing it round my own neck."

"Very well," returned the other eagerly, "will you drive the thing out towards me? I will get round by the side." And he started off at a gallop.

Elmore kept on to the thicket of cane, expecting some species of deer was there hidden. But when his horse was within a few yards of the outer fringe it suddenly twisted round with a snort of terror, almost unseating him. Gaining the mastery after a severe tussle, he again forced the mustang, with ears pricked, shoulders in a lather, and muscles quivering, up to within a yard or two,

when he spread his forefeet out and refused to stir. A low, querulous, snarling sounded from the thicket, then as Elmore shouted, to encourage the quarry, whatever it was, to move, there was a sound of splashing within, and a solitary swan, making a tremendous clatter with its wings, arose. The mustang reared up, and as it came down Elmore drove the spurs in. Confused and smarting with pain, the terror-stricken animal was into the canes with a bound, and as the supple reeds struck the rider across the face he was conscious of a terrible din, combined of loud quacking, flapping of wings, and a savage roar. His mount struggled through the water, crashed into the canes beyond, then drew up on the plain, and Elmore realised the cause of the uproar. To his right, following across the plain, was a large dun-coloured animal.

A ringing shout of "El puma!" drew his attention to the Cacique, who, with his body bent, was urging his horse to full gallop in pursuit.

"Well, I'm hanged!" was Elmore's muttered exclamation, as he thought what might have happened if the mountain lion had sprung upon him in the canes. "He should have warned me." Then with a "Yoicks!" he joined in the chase.

The puma did not seem to be hurrying, but easily kept the lead, with his tail strung out and the white of his belly gleaming as his hind quarters went up at each spring. For a quarter of a mile he kept his lead, then he suddenly stopped and looked back over his shoulder. Then he swung round, crouched close to the ground, panting heavily, his tail jerking from side to side, and his white teeth showing. The Cacique reined in about fifty yards off, waiting for Elmore to come up.

"He means to fight. He is fat and cannot run more."

Elmore quickly unstrapped his rifle.

"No, no, don't shoot. At any rate not unless I miss with the bolas. Give him a few seconds to get his wind."

The Cacique twisted a cigarette and lighted it, spoke soothingly to his horse, and swinging the bolas, rode towards the crouching beast. The puma lowered its head and gathered its haunches, and Elmore stood fascinated, his glance going quickly from the bolas to the yellow form on the ground. Straight up the Cacique rode, slightly crouching in his saddle, a slight movement of his brown wrist giving the momentum to the three balls each on its own thong of braided hide—up to within twenty feet, when there were three movements, almost simultaneously—the puma's bound to a savage roar, the whiz of the bolas, and the swift sidelong plunge of the mustang. The next moment the puma was on the ground snarling and tearing, while the Cacique, reining in his horse, freed his lasso.

"Let me finish him," he cried, as he saw Elmore endeavouring to cover the struggling puma, whose foreleg was bound securely to his body by the coil of the bolas. The long hide shot out its snake-like coils, the loop sank over the round head, and with a violent jerk, as the mustang started off, and, with a choking scream, the great cat was drawn over the ground.

"By Jove! that was a fine bit of work," said Elmore, as they viewed the dead body.

The Cacique laughed. There was a sparkle in his eyes, a dark flush in his cheeks, that told of the sporting blood of his English father, and he looked handsome in his animation.

"It was a good run," he said.

"If you had missed with the bolas it would have gone hard with you."

"Had it been a jaguar, yes. But a puma is content to scratch and run."

At noon of the third day they sighted some ruined remains, overgrown with scrub and trees.

"It is the chalpas," said the Cacique, "the burial tower of the Aztecs. It is there we shall meet Ramon, or near it, for I doubt if he has the courage to enter

within its walls. Ah, yes, there he is," and he pointed to the figure of a man under a tree some distance from the ruin.

Ramon ran forward to meet them, with a look of joy in his open brown face. The Cacique, however, did not stop, but rode on to the tree and dismounted, then bade Ramon build a fire. It was not until after they had eaten, and the inevitable cigarette was lighted, that he gravely signified to the young peon that he could speak. This the latter did with great volubility, pointing continually to the north-west, while Elmore intently watched his friend's face for some indication of the message. He could read nothing, however, in the cold grey eyes and thin, firm lips, and had to wait till the peon had finished.

"Well?" he said presently, when the flood of eloquence ceased, and Ramon stood waiting for the praise he felt was due to him and the money he had earned.

The Cacique paid over the money and pointed to the puma skin.

"You have done well," he said. "Vaya con dios."

Ramon hid his money in the lining of his poncho, swung the hide over his shoulder, and with a salute and a laughing suggestion to beware of the ghosts of the Chulpas, he went off at a dancing step.

CHAPTER XIV

HIS ENEMY

"WELL," said Elmore again, "what did he say? Has he been successful? Is my brother well?"

The Cacique puffed at his cigarette, then coolly rolled another.

"The little one is well," he said, "and Pedro has gone towards the gathering-place of the filibusteros. So much Ramon heard from one of the men who had gone with Pedro.

"Now let me tell you what is in my mind," continued the chief. "These men who have used you as their tool have designs much greater than those you have mentioned, such, for instance, as the making of money from a gold mine which does not exist. Whatever money they have captured in your country is, I am sure, to be used for another scheme, and not for their pleasure. When the filibusteros were here before, they, or, at any rate, their leaders, had in their hearts a great hope, and that was the discovery of the hidden wealth of the Incas. They robbed and they raided to win the means for continuing their search. They did not succeed, that I know; but I know also that they had certain information that the treasure was in existence and undisturbed. They know, too, a certain valley in which the treasure was buried, and that all the engineering skill of the Aztecs was called upon to find a sure way of hiding the wealth. The country near where the hidden treasure

lies is forest-grown, wild, and overrun by Indians, so that those who search there are compelled to go in numbers and strongly armed. The old band was dispersed for want of means, and now that the means have been found the old search will be continued. I need not tell you what cause I have to hate these men—that is my own sorrow, calling for revenge whether I had met you or not. But it seems to me that you are concerned in this re-gathering of the band.”

“I do not see it.”

“Yet it seems to me clear. I have said that great engineering skill was used in the burying of the treasure. Señor Ferdinand himself has studied engineering, but he has no experience, and his experiments were costly and of no use. What more natural than that they should try to secure your services?”

“If they had wished for my services, they would have told me in the first place.”

“Not so. For they were under the necessity to raise money, and required your name to help them out with that supposed mine.”

“But then why should they have threatened my life, or taken my brother prisoner?”

“They threatened you with violence to make you the more eager to accept service with them, and they took your little boy to bring you to them. They knew that you would not have accepted any other offer from them after the way they served you over the mine, unless they could force you.”

“But,” said Elmore in amazement, “you yourself a moment ago said I would lose my life if I ventured among them, and apparently from what you say they would receive me gladly.”

The Cacique smiled.

“Would you accept service with them now?”

“No,” was the emphatic reply.

“Not if they offered you a share of the hidden wealth?”

"Not if they offered me the whole."

"Are you sure?"

Elmore met the other's keen gaze with an indignant glance.

"I knew it," said the Cacique quietly. "They would be glad to receive you, provided you would accept their terms."

"But I think you are wrong; they wished me to quit the country for Brazil."

"That was merely a trick. What they wanted was that you should quit the mountains for the side farthest from the sea, when they would have had you in their power. And just think, my friend, of your position. With your brother in their hands they would have bent your will to anything."

"Do you think they had this treasure-hunting in their minds when they engaged me in London?"

"Certainly. Think over in your mind. Were there no words spoken that conveyed a hidden meaning, dark to you when uttered, but plain in the light of what you have now heard?"

"Let me think," said Elmore. "I recall that Colonel Colston was against my taking my brother with me, but that suddenly he changed his mind."

"Ah! Then he saw a way of using the boy. What else?"

"His daughter warned me frequently of the danger before me. It was she who placed the chain round the boy's neck, and in a letter which I received at the mountain she begged me to do whatever was suggested. My God! What is the matter?"

The Cacique's expression had undergone an awful change. The pupils of his eyes were like pin points, his face was bloodless and yellow, and his chest heaved.

"His daughter! Has that man a daughter?" he gasped.

Elmore went cold to the heart. "He knows," he thought.

"Yes," he said aloud, in a constrained voice, "he has a daughter."

"And what is he like, this Colonel Colston?"

Elmore briefly described the Colonel.

"And the daughter?"

"She is tall and dark, with black hair; a beautiful girl, whose life, I think, has not been happy."

The Cacique drew in his breath. A terrible smile rested on his thin lips, and he muttered in an unknown tongue.

"You seem interested," ventured Elmore uneasily.

"Do I look pleased?" said the other, with the same awful smile. "I am pleased. You have told me something that rejoices me. I know this man and his daughter. He is tall, you say. Look! are not his eyes like mine?"

"For God's sake, don't talk like that!" cried Elmore, for there was such fury and hate in the other's expression, as transformed his face into a hideous mask.

"Are these eyes like his?" cried the other, clutching at his breast. "This cursed colour, the badge of my disgrace. Are they like his? Such eyes as looked coldly on my mother when she begged for my life, not hers, when she wept at his feet, when she lowered her forehead to the dust for my sake! Are they like his? Yes, do not lie to me. I read all in your white face. Oh, my mother! He shall read in my eyes what you found in his, and find no mercy there. None! None!"

Staggering to his feet, with his arms waving, he went towards the burial tower, and was soon hidden by the trees.

"Good Heavens!" muttered Elmore aghast. "If Colonel Colston is really his father, and they meet! And I have given him the clue!"

He sat with knitted brows, brooding over this abyss of seething passion he had unveiled, and before his eyes there rose the sorrow-lined, beautiful face of Marion,

the daughter of one, the sister of the other. "It would kill her," he muttered. "Ay, it would be either death or madness, and father and son must not meet. They shall not meet!" Presently he walked towards the Chalpas, pushed his way through the scrub, climbed a crumbling wall, and found himself at the base of a tower, split and torn by the roots of trees growing from its heart. Going round, he came to a great fissure which disclosed a tomb and a mummified body. Near by stood the Cacique motionless, with his long, black hair falling over his broad shoulders, from which he had stripped poncho and shirt. A thin stream of blood ran down his chest, and as Elmore stooped forward he saw that the flesh had been pinched up, and pierced through with a large thorn, from which trailed a length of knotted hide. As he looked the Cacique raised his hand, and slowly drew the thorn and the knotted string through the wound.

"What the devil are you about?" said Elmore, with a shudder of disgust.

"Be still," said the other solemnly; and three times he drew the blood-stained string through his flesh, while Elmore stood by sick and angry.

"This is the tomb of men of my race," continued the other in hollow tones. "Their resting-place has been sheltered by trees, and dogs have robbed them of their arms and their sacred symbols. But the place is holy, and I do penance before them. For it is in the law that a child must honour its parent, and I crave forgiveness for the thought that is in my mind. And it has been whispered to me that as my father was not of their race, or faith, or country—my duty is not to him; no, not to him, but to her he wronged."

"That is not their word," said Elmore sternly. "It is the whisper from your own heart."

"My heart is heavy within me," said the other, with a look of gloom, "but the fury has left me. See. I ask you to forget the words I spoke."

"And will you forget them, too? Else there is no joy for you here or hereafter."

"There is no joy for me. You are right. The shadow of my race is upon me, and it reaches beyond the grave. You have disclosed to me the man who killed my mother, but only I know what suffering she endured before she died. He is your enemy. He is mine, too, and our paths so wide apart until now have been miraculously joined together to the end that we may bring him to justice. Let us go forward, for now we must succeed. I see the finger of the gods in this."

Although he stood there freshly lacerated and blood-stained in the practice of his sombre religion, and spoke of vengeance on his own father, there was yet a dignity about him that had its effect on Elmore.

"Before we go further," he said gravely, "let me tell you that from what Pedro told me I had already connected you with Colonel Colston and his daughter. I have no right to come between you and him. But if his daughter is your sister, I ask you to think of her happiness before everything. I know her. She is one you would be proud to love, and I warn you that you could do the memory of your mother no greater wrong than by doing anything that will bring unhappiness to her daughter."

"Let us speak no more of that," said the other darkly. "My wrongs are my own, and you have no part in them."

"But you have yourself given me a part in them."

"I have no sister," was the stern reply; "no father. But you have a little brother in the keeping of these people, and it would be better for him if he soon left them."

He strode away to where there was a spring of water, and Elmore went back to the camp. There he was soon joined by his companion, calm and self-possessed again. The horses were saddled, and they set out in silence.

About the same time two other bands were shaping

for the same destination from different points. Miss Marion Colston with a female companion, and Mr. Ferdinand had left Truxillo with a large party of so-called muleteers, ostensibly for the thickly populated Los Sierras in the Cordilleras. The leader of the muleteers was the man Gomez we have seen in London as valet of Colonel Colston, and the men he had gathered together were really old soldiers, while the mules carried large stores of ammunition and dynamite.

The other party was a smaller band of travellers under the leadership of Colonel Colston, making in the same direction from a point farther north of Truxillo. The Colonel had left his yacht at New Orleans, with the majority of the guests he had invited for a cruise, and had come on with Miss Dunell and her aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Milcent.

CHAPTER XV

THE DEAD CITY

SEVERAL days later two of these bands were descending one of the long spurs of the Andes that run from the snow-clad summit in an unbroken slope of many miles down into the sombre woods of the vast and still unexplored Montana, pierced at intervals by the swift tributaries of the mighty Amazon, and peopled by unconquered and warlike tribes of Indians.

The larger of the two parties was winding down the zig-zag path, and the foremost rider had already disappeared into the wood when the second band emerged from the mists that hung round the head of the mountain. The leader of the second band drew rein on a small plateau, where he was joined almost immediately by a lady, whose eyes sparkled with pleasure as the magnificent view lay outspread at her feet—the boundless forest whose sombre hue was relieved by splashes of green and yellow, where crops of maize and coca grew in the tiny clearings, or by the silver gleaming of broad rivers.

They were Colonel Colston and Miss Dunell.

"It is worth coming so far to see," she said, "and I tell you frankly, if I had been disappointed I should have declined to go a yard farther."

"I knew you would thank me," he said. "But this is not all."

"No," she answered slowly, "it is not all. I do not see the lost city, but if it should resolve itself into a few lizard-infested ruins, grey and sordid, as those we saw

in the hideous pampas, I will forgive you in the presence of that marvellous wood."

"Come," he said, and, descending a short way, turned aside to the right, where he dismounted and helped her to the ground.

"Let me blindfold you," he said.

"The mystery increases," she murmured, with a smile on her lips and a questioning look in her eyes.

"There is no mystery, merely a little surprise. You will be safe in my hands; don't be afraid."

"Afraid! Why it has been the one complaint of aunt that I have been over-daring. I submit myself to be blindfolded in the full expectation of looking upon a brigand at least, when the bandage is withdrawn."

He lightly tied the handkerchief, then led her round a large boulder to a ledge at the brink of a steep precipice. Here he took firm hold of her arm, and withdrew the bandage.

"Look!" he said, and pointed below.

An exclamation escaped from her lips. She drew back a step in alarm at the sheer descent, then bent forward and gazed spellbound, with parted lips and a faint colour. He slipped his hand and arm from her arm to her waist to support her more firmly, and his breathing came a little quicker.

"Wonderful!" she murmured, "oh, most wonderful!"

What she looked upon was a wide valley about a thousand feet below—a valley that spread out between the enclosing arms of two great precipitous spurs of the mountain, and, narrowing again, finally ran some six miles away into the gloomy depths of the forest. At her feet was a mountain torrent, white as carded wool, where it fretted against huge boulders, then running swift and dark at the foot of the opposite precipice, next bursting forth lower down in a broad band of silver at the head of the valley, and half-way down broadening out into a lake from which radiated numerous streams throughout cultivated fields. From the centre of the

lake rose a lofty tower of a rich red, and on the far bank, in terrace on terrace, was some vast white building, and on the near bank other buildings of white stone. The whole valley was rich in colour. There were patches of scarlet, rich masses of blue, wide squares of yellow, and shades of green, while the walls of the valley were clothed in terraces as with hanging gardens, and threaded with a white lacery where tiny streams descended.

"Now look up here," he said; and drew her gently round, so that she faced the mountain, where it was cleft almost, as it seemed, to its summit by a narrow gorge. High up was the radiant summit, a peak of snow, white against the deep blue, and below, a veil of mist that went and came and coiled soft and beautiful; below that was the black lip of the gorge, shining with the moisture upon it; and, falling down and down, was the mountain stream dispersed into a veil of whiteness that shone with startling brilliancy out of the dark jaws of the narrow cleft. At the base of the gorge were great palms whose graceful leaves glistened through the iridescent cloud of vapour. It was a scene to hold the dullest entranced, but beyond the beauty of it there was something that fired the imagination—the lingering spirit of a lost people, whose genius had left its sign upon the enduring rock, and in cyclopean buildings square and rugged. The grandeur of the black and tremendous gorge, with its towering walls leading the gaze up through the clouds to the tremendous summit far back in the Cordilleras, afforded a striking contrast to the soft outlines of the cradled valley, with its restful lake and its cultivated fields; and then beyond, stretching to the dim horizon, lay outspread the sombre forest, fraught with mystery; but rock and mountain, water and forest, lost their interest when the eye came back to the silent tower and the desolate palace, with all that they told of a great race that had once done great deeds under the shadow of the mountain, on the fringe of the mysterious forest, and down the vast arteries that led to the Amazon.

His gaze, cold and hard, dwelt swiftly on every feature of the scene, as if to take note whether all was in order; then rested with a touch of triumph on the eager, beautiful face beside him.

"What do you think of this?" he said.

"Oh, beautiful!" she murmured, with parted lips.

"Then you are not disappointed?"

"Ah, no. Nothing has ever moved me like this. Had I imagination, it is in just such a valley I would have pictured the Garden of the Hesperides."

"And would you be content to live there?"

"For a month," she said, with a smile, "no longer. Life has other prizes than the overwhelming beauty of Nature."

"Yet beautiful women, born to rule, have lived there and been content. These silent buildings have rung with their laughter, and great captains and greater law-givers have sat at their feet. The buildings could be renewed, the valley again ring with life, if you say the word."

She looked once more over the scene, and the animation left her face. "It would have no abiding attraction for me," she said calmly.

"Nor for me either. But a month is all I ask. In a month, Beatrice, I hope to offer you something more than this scene from a pantomime, something that will enable you to play out the drama of life as you could play it among the greatest people of Europe; and that something is boundless wealth and its possibilities."

"Wealth here!"

"Yes, here, at our feet. In this valley lies a treasure accumulated for a century by successive Curacas, or Inca viceroys, and I have brought you here to share in the triumph of its discovery."

"Are you relating one of those fantastic dreams of buried treasure that lead people into aimless expeditions, and so often end in ruin or madness?" she asked, with a slight sarcastic smile.

"It is no dream," he said calmly. "The treasure is there in that green casket. That I know from a descendant of the last Inca viceroy. And I will find it. I went to London with a scheme to raise sufficient funds to continue the work I have already carried on here. This valley is mine. I bought it. I placed Indians in charge, to cultivate the fields in my absence and guard it against adventurers, and I have assembled here now a band of men who will hold it in turn against the Indians or whoever else may envy my fortune. This is my aim, my dream if you like, though it is founded on reality. And I ask you to help me with your woman's wit, to share in my success and in the realisation of the power and position that success will win."

She looked again at the valley with renewed interest and a return of colour to her cheeks, while she turned his words over in her mind. She had, since she knew Colonel Colston, tasted something of the pleasures of wealth and the keener joy of influence, and she had no wish to relinquish that position if she could help it. But though his proposal stirred her mind, it left her heart unmoved.

"Colonel Colston," she said presently, speaking gravely and sweetly, "you have been most generous to me and most considerate. If I had with me a guardian whose judgment I could respect more than I can that of uncle, I would ask his advice. But I must deal with this myself."

"It is yourself I want," said the Colonel, "and not your uncle."

"If I had such a guardian," she continued calmly, "his first word to you would be to ask for proof."

"I could have wished," he said, with a sigh, "that you had trusted me. I have the proof. Here it is."

He took out a pocket-book, opened it, and produced a thin metal case, from which he took a thin disc of gold about two and a half inches in diameter. This he placed in the palm of her hand.

"What is this?" she said.

"The Incas' sign—or totem."

She observed it silently for some moments, then looked up at him mutely for an explanation. He stood close beside her, and her hair touched his face as together they bent over the shining metal, a curious relic of an ancient people.

"In the centre," he said, "you see the figure of the god Quexacotl, the god of rivers; from his feet flow four streams to the four points of the compass. Look down into the valley. The tower in the centre of the lake represents the god; the four streams radiating from the lake are the lines on the disc. From east to west there are two curved lines on the disc. Those represent the course of the sun. There are seven starred spots on the disc at irregular intervals round the circumference, and one of those spots indicates the site of the treasure."

It was a curious piece of work, the figure of the god with the waving water lines traced in a few firm touches, and the feathers in his head-dress exquisitely outlined.

"It is very interesting as a curio," but there was a sparkle in her eyes that belied her words.

He took the disc from her hand and span it out over the valley. It flashed in the sun like a flame, then, as the air caught it from beneath, it flew high like a bird and darted again swiftly down on its edge towards the base of the cliff at their feet.

"Why did you do that?" she said, turning to him with a blaze of anger and amazement; for as the sun caught the spinning disc she seemed to see for an instant the store of treasure, and as it fell into the shadow all the wealth again faded.

"If you will not share in the secret," he said, "no one else shall."

"But I did not doubt your story;" and she bit her lips and clasped her fingers.

"I am well rid of it," he went on quietly. "It was more dangerous for a man to carry that bit of gold about

than the Koh-i-noor. Already it has been the cause of many deaths, of treachery and betrayal. The secret it contained may perish. We will stay in the valley for a week and then return to our old life, content that for one moment we had a glimpse into the possibility of unlimited power."

"I do not recognise Colonel Colston in those timid words," she said, with scorn. "If I had within my reach such an opportunity as you have hinted at, I would not leave a stone unturned, or a foot of soil unexamined, until I had found the treasure, or satisfied myself that it did not exist."

"Yet," he said, with affected surprise, "a moment ago you scoffed at the very idea."

She laughed a short, hard laugh.

"You forget that while this idea was new to me you had had it before you for years. You sprang it upon me suddenly, without explanation or preparation, and when I naturally asked for information you acted like a boy in a pet."

The Colonel had played a bold game in pretending to destroy his own clue to the treasure, but there was no smile on his face when he spoke again.

"Well, Beatrice, I tell you solemnly that the buried treasure is there intact, and I tell you that I will find it if you will be my wife. I ask you again, and I want your promise now, for the difficulties are great, and the incentive must be great. If I know that when the treasure is unlocked it will unlock your heart, I will take up the enterprise."

"You place my consent at a low level," she said haughtily.

"My dear Beatrice, I am not a young man, and in place of a romance of love I offer you the romance of ambition, and the power to satisfy it; and of the two, ambition is the more lasting and has the greater attraction to a woman of your will and beauty. Do you consent?"

"But the disc?"

"I will recover it," he said, and a look of something like command came into his steely grey eyes.

"I consent," she murmured, with a slight shudder.

The Colonel lifted her cold hand to his lips, but there was neither triumph nor ardour in his face, and though she was not proud of her conquest, her pride was in arms at once against his phlegm. So she called up a smile as she lifted her heavily fringed eyes, but he was looking keenly at some moving figures far off in the valley, the very image of a soldier, erect, firmly knit, with an air of command on his square features and in his hawk-like glance.

"I think we had better go in search of your aunt and uncle. We shall find your aunt sitting on a rock with folded hands waiting for that earthquake she has expected so long; and your uncle, the astronomer, studying the sign of the sun in the valley. You wondered why I had brought such an unpractical traveller as your uncle so far; now perhaps you have a clue."

"I thought I insisted upon his coming," she answered.

"True, and that is the more providential because he is the one man I should have selected to work out the astronomical puzzle of the Inca priests. I tried to work out that puzzle before by guessing; but I found that an intellect trained in the science of astronomy could alone follow out the lines conceived by trained intellects over a century ago."

"Am I to consider, then, that my uncle is merely here as a pawn in your game?"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Perhaps," she continued, with an offended air, "I, too, am only a pawn."

"A queen, my dear Beatrice, who commands all."

"You have said nothing about Elmore. Does he take a part in this game?"

"I was waiting for you to mention him," said the Colonel quietly. "Yes; he, too, will have his part."

At present, as I understand, he has made an erratic move and is out of hand, but I think with your help we can get him back and under control. The Incas were greater as engineers than as astronomers, and his engineering skill will be absolutely necessary."

She dropped her hands helplessly.

"Did you think of all this before you left London? Did you arrange to get us all here under your control like so many puppets?"

"When I consider that there will be three women in the valley, your aunt, yourself, and my daughter, I think it likely that I myself may prove to be the puppet."

"Your daughter! Is she here?"

"Yes. I thought you would be more happy with a companion a little younger than your aunt, and I arranged for Marion to be here. If I am not mistaken, it is she who is talking with your uncle," and he pointed to two figures on a rock lower down.

The man was middle-aged, thin, with a straggling grey beard, large startled-looking eyes, and a gentle, timid manner. He stood with his hands clasped behind him, and looked now at the girl's face, now down into the valley, as she apparently pointed out objects of interest.

"It is my daughter," said the Colonel, as he drew near, and he called out: "Ah, Mr. Milcent, I see you have already found out the beauties of the mountain side. What legend has Marion been telling you?" He took his daughter's hand, and holding it without offering her any further greeting, turned to Miss Dunell. "Miss Dunell—my daughter."

Miss Dunell smiled graciously as they shook hands.

"What a surprising country this is," she murmured, in her richest and softest tones, "where one finds a charming companion as if by magic! But tell me, how did you come here, and where did you meet my uncle?"

She looked round to draw Mr. Milcent into the conversation, but that gentleman, after one puzzled glance

at the new arrivals, had turned to resume his absorbed inspection of the valley.

"I am almost tempted to ask," said Marion, with an answering smile, "how you came here. But as for me, I arrived a few minutes ago, and remained behind to look at the valley while the rest of the party went on."

"We must get along," interposed the Colonel. "Come, Milcent, you will have opportunity enough to inspect these old remains, and study the science of your past-masters from the records they have left in stone. By the way, where is Mrs. Milcent?"

"She ran away with one of the mules," said Mr. Milcent vaguely; "and I am afraid I forgot all about her, listening to that young lady's explanation of the design assumed by the water in the valley below. She told me that the Incas were astronomers, and was explaining to me how they took the solstice."

"Oh, she was explaining to you, was she?" said the Colonel, with an amused smile. "Marion, this is Mr. Milcent, the astronomer."

Marion detected the irony in her father's words.

"I hope Mr. Milcent does not think I was trying to instruct him," she said, with a blush.

The shy man looked up at the Colonel.

"I was deeply impressed by a remark made by the young lady that this beautiful valley, with its ruined temples and its signs of a beneficent civilisation, is like a great hope suddenly extinguished; and it impresses me, as it did her, with the thought of a noble people whose works have not been improved by those who replaced them."

"Very pretty," said the Colonel, with a curious glance at his daughter, "but I was not aware that Marion had any knowledge of the Aztecs."

"It seems to me," said Marion in low tones, as she looked once again at the quiet scene below, "that I have been here before, and have looked down upon that valley. Have I, father?"

"When you were a baby. But these reminiscences may be discussed later. We must not forget that Mrs. Milcent may endanger the life of the mule, and mules are valuable."

He led the way back to the mountain track where the servants were waiting with the mules, and they resumed their march in single file.

Miss Dunell rode on calmly and apparently impassive, though her active mind was never more alert in reviewing the one absorbing subject of her future prospects. Marion Colston, on the contrary, showed in her heightened colour the excitement which this meeting had thrown her into. She was sure this was no holiday expedition, that her father had some great design in preparation, and she wondered what part Miss Dunell had to play. She had prepared herself to dislike the beautiful woman who rode ahead of her, and at the first swift questioning glance when they met, her dislike had crystallised.

CHAPTER XVI

LITTLE JACK

THEY went down the long, steep spur of the mountain into the fringe of the forest, and then, turning sharply to the right, entered a narrow track which took them once more to the edge of the valley, at this point some three thousand feet lower than where they had first stopped. In place, however, of the tremendous precipice that there sank from their feet, and of the dark gorge that ascended on their right to the gleaming pinnacles of snow, was a narrow chasm, lined with trees, and the sides of it festooned with creepers and bordered with ferns. Nevertheless the chasm was deep, and the slight, swinging bridge that spanned it not very inviting.

Certainly not inviting now, for in the centre of the frail structure, which was swung on cables of twisted aloe fibre and built of bamboo and cane, squatted a mule, with its rider, a lady, tugging at the reins. The mule was trembling violently, and to the spectators, who stood horrified on the edge of the ravine, it seemed that the bridge must part from its moorings and precipitate both mule and lady into the swift river below ; but the lady on the bridge evidently had no apprehension.

"Bravo, Mrs. Milcent!" shouted the Colonel, "a strong pull, and a long pull, and the noble steed is saved."

The lady thus addressed peeped over the side of the bridge at them, and waved her hand.

"By Jove!" said the Colonel, "she's got some pluck. I don't know a woman who would have trusted herself to that bridge on the first experience, and certainly not one who would not have fainted if her mule had squatted like that."

Mr. Milcent looked helplessly at his wife, Miss Dunell grew white and turned away, the Colonel took out a cigar and lit it, but Marion, jumping from the saddle, stepped on to the bridge, grasping either side firmly, and advanced gingerly, yet with a sure step. But the mule blocked the way, and she was brought to a halt.

"I think you had better go back, my dear," said Mrs. Milcent calmly, as she peeped round at Marion. She was a little woman, dressed neatly in grey, with a pretty round face, now flushed with exertion, and Marion felt a strong impulse to climb along the side, catch the little body up, and carry her to the farther side.

"Yes, Marion," shouted the Colonel, "come back. There is only one way to settle this difficulty."

Marion went back, and her father advanced with a firm step, though his weight alarmingly increased the swing. He drew his hunting knife.

"Let go the rein," he said sternly. Then with a few swift, strong cuts he severed the fastenings that secured the cross-pieces under the mule, and that unfortunate animal, with a fearful scream, shot through the bridge into the water.

"Oh, you brute!" said Mrs. Milcent, as she stood trembling now at the other side of the gap, her round eyes gazing in horror from the Colonel to the dark waters below.

"Can you walk to the bank?" said the Colonel, with a smile, "or shall I step across and carry you?" Then he whistled shrilly, and in a few minutes several men came up; swarthy-faced men, with bright ponchos and velvet caps. At a word from the Colonel, they drew their machetes, cut down lianas, and repaired the breach, after which the remainder of the party, after much hesi-

tation, ventured across. When they had all crossed, Colonel Colston gave an order, and the men cut through the moorings of the bridge, so that the structure fell into the water and trailed down the farther bank.

"You are all my prisoners," said the Colonel, turning to the group gathered in sympathy round Mrs. Milcent, who, however, so far from needing sympathy, was quietly studying Marion Colston with the keen and comprehensive regard that one pretty woman gives to another.

"Your prisoners?" she said quickly, laying her hand on her husband's arm in a protecting manner, and Marion noted what a resolute mouth the little lady had.

"Yes. We have burnt our boats. There is no means of exit until that bridge is repaired. We have reached our destination at last. Our party is complete, and there will be no use for any of us to grow homesick until the time for departure, in, let us say, three months."

"I think, Colonel Colston," said the little woman, "you should have done us the courtesy to consult our wishes. I am sure my husband would not care to remain penned up in this melancholy wood, and my niece——"

"My dear madam, your husband is eager to study the science of the Incas, and he could not have a more favourable opportunity; while I have already consulted the wishes of your niece."

"Dear me! My wishes, I presume, are of no importance."

"On the contrary, you will have the privilege of managing the entire community, and I may tell you that there is a wide field for your amazing energy."

"What community? If I may judge from the noise," she said, glancing at the tree tops, from which proceeded a constant chatter, "the only community is one of monkeys. Oh, you little pet—you exquisite little gem!"

This last not in reference to a monkey, but to a humming bird, whose bejewelled wings, vibrating within a few inches of the lady's face, sparkled and flashed.

"There needs no further words from me," laughed the Colonel, as he pushed on through another belt of wood. On the edge of this they paused; for they were on the border of the valley, where its lower end ran out into the forest. To the right it widened out and stretched up at a gentle slope to where it narrowed between the enclosing walls of rock, and at the extreme end, veiled by the mist of falling water, was the black gorge that carried the eye up and up the towering height of the mountain, to the far-off peak of snow. Before them was a stretch of grass, carpeted with brilliant flowers, over which roamed troops of horses, mules, and milch cows. Beyond this, farther up the valley, were plantations of coca, of sugar cane, and maize, with a few toldos scattered about, around which moved white-robed women and children. Farther up, on a second plateau, were the walls of a ruined city. They passed up through a grove of cinchona trees, whose red-veined leaves gave them a rich colouring, skirted the fields of maize, and as they mounted to the central plateau they saw where the river they had just crossed entered the forest through a deep channel, which continued the line of the precipice. The channel had the appearance of having been cut by human agency, and this was indeed the case. A similar channel ran on the opposite side—in continuance of the precipice, and the course of these two channels tended inwards after following the spurs of the mountain, until where they emptied themselves into the river they actually united.

The valley was by these means converted into the shape of a cigar, the upper end running into the inaccessible gorge, and the lower end, after piercing a part of the forest, terminating in the river, which it reached through a deep channel protected from ingress. In the centre of the valley was the lake which fed the two channels, and the ghostly ruined city of the Incas. Under the precipice, and hitherto hidden from view, were a collection of toldos, and above them, on a grassy

knoll, a single-storeyed quinta, of roomy dimensions, set within a loop-holed wall. A number of armed men, who were lounging about the toldos, lined up as the party appeared, and saluted the Colonel. Among them was our friend Pedro, the muleteer, no longer muleteer, but a lieutenant, and at their head Gomez, the grim captain, the former butler. Each man carried a Martini rifle, with a bandolier of cartridges and a machete. They were a hard, reckless-looking lot of men, of the various types of half-breeds, mulatto, chinos, and Zambo negroes, their officers being Mastizos, the descendants of Inca Indians with Spaniards.

"What a picturesque band of ruffians!" murmured Mrs. Milcent. "Do you know, my dear," turning to Marion, "I rather think that Colonel Colston is no better than a brigand!"

"He is my father," said Marion.

"That convinces me," said the little lady, with a quizzing smile. "Stately you are, and dark, fiery tempered and warm-hearted, like the brigand's daughter should be. But who is this little boy?"

Marion turned, looked, then sprang down and caught up a little figure, bare-legged and bare-headed, who had been running shyly alongside.

"This is my little sweetheart," she said with a lovely smile; "my dear little Jack, who has crossed the mountain like a man."

"Surely this is not little Elmore?" cried Miss Dunell, looking rather disdainfully at the ragged clothes and bare, brown legs.

"If there are any more surprises, please let us have them all together. First I find that Colonel Colston has a daughter, and a very charming daughter, too; then I find that he has a band of desperadoes; and lastly, a little ragamuffin, whom I last heard of in London, starts from some hole in the earth. I will not say drops from the skies, for he bears trace of earthly origin."

Mrs. Milcent stood on tiptoe to kiss the thin, little face.

"Where is Mr. Elmore? Where is your brother, Jack?" asked Miss Dunell.

"Brother is lost," said Jack, with a quaver; "and when I gets big I am going out with a gun to find him."

"How thin he is!" muttered Mrs. Milcent. "Bring him in, my dear, and we'll make some broth for him."

"The soldiers is laughing at me," whispered Jack, "let me hold your hand and walk."

Marion set him down, and with his head up, and his eyes bright with joy, he walked by her side, then limped painfully. She looked at him, seemed only then to see how poorly clad the little chap was, how thin and hollow-eyed, and she turned on her father, with her head back and her eyes flashing.

"Look at that!" she cried. "See how your men have treated him—a child, alone and ill. Oh, if I were a man, I would make some one suffer for this!"

Colonel Colston picked the little boy up and placed him on his shoulder.

"Now, my boy," he said quietly, "I will whisper to you what to say to the soldiers, and you must shout after me."

"Attention!" whispered the Colonel.

"Attention!" came in quavering, childish tones.

The soldiers smiled and clinked their heels, so that their spurs jangled.

"Present arms!"

"Present arms!" shouted the little boy, eagerly now.

The rifles were brought to a salute, and the grim captain flourished his knife.

"Ground arms!" was whispered and shouted.

"Dismiss!"

The men broke up laughing, and the Colonel went into the outer court of the quinta, with the little boy triumphantly drumming with his naked heels on his chest.

"Your father is a clever man," said Mrs. Milcent, as she followed by Marion's side. "He has prevented a scene, won the boy's heart, and made those men show respect to the little fellow. I almost think I am afraid of him."

They were met at the porch of the quinta by Mr. Ferdinand, who looked cool in a suit of complete white surmounted by a Panama hat.

"A thousand welcomes, ladies," he said, "to our valley. Your rooms are ready, and the feast is spread in the patio."

"Who is this romantic-looking robber?" murmured the irrepressible little lady, "the villain or the lover? He looks as if he could play either part to perfection. Oh," she added, after a glance at her companion's troubled face, "I hope I have not committed another *faux pas*."

"This is Mr. Ferdinand, your joint-host," said the Colonel, as he presented the party. "Mrs. Milcent, perhaps you will do us the honour to take the house and all that is in it under your care. Our party is now complete with the exception of Mr. Elmore, and I hope to have him with us. Have you heard of him, Ferdinand?"

"Mr. Elmore is not far off," said Ferdinand, with a significant look.

"Brother is lost!" said Jack. "Pedro and me, we looked for him, and I have looked for him all days."

"All right, little chap. I'll find him for you," said the Colonel. "Don't be afraid."

In the afternoon they went down to the lake, and looked on the ruins of the Incas, and of a people who had preceded even them.

The lake gave a living touch to the gaunt, white ruins. It softened their grim outlines, and seemed to narrow the limit between the present and the past, when its clear waters reflected the perfect tower and wall and the gay colours of a happy people. The water

lapped in music along the pebbled shore, as it had rippled at the feet of laughing girls long days ago. The swan and the ibis, direct descendants of the birds whose stately beauty had increased the charm of the scene to Inca eyes, sailed upon its bosom, or waded in the shallows. Soft and calm it lay, outstretched on a perfect level from which radiated the seven branches in narrow hewn channels, and from a rock in the exact centre rose a tower of red stone, whose long shadow lay straight upon the unruffled water, as the shadow on a burnished sun-dial. The ruins stretched right and left, in crumbling walls, in squares and terraces, and in one long colonnade nearly a mile in length, of stones more than the height of a tall man, that terminated in a rectangular mound, whose base was of cyclopean blocks. This mound was in three lessening cubes, the height of the first wall being thirty feet, of the next twenty feet, and of the last ten feet. In another part were the outlines of what had been a palace, with one great hall of two hundred paces by sixty paces wide, and of numerous smaller rooms. Vast as the walls had been, Nature had shattered and scattered them in wild confusion, by an agency so light that the lightest breath of air could blow it whither it liked. A few seeds borne from the dark forest beyond had fallen into the cracks, had taken root, and the slow growth had riven and overborne walls which would have resisted the blows of heavy cannon. Here and there intact was a massive stone beam, a carved cornice, or a portico, bearing the blurred tracing of a human head, with radiating beams, and elsewhere were figures with condor heads, but ruin and decay had left their mark on every building, with the exception of the solid pyramid, and the red tower out in the quiet lake.

Marion Colston lingered by the lake, as the others roamed amongst the ruins, led by the Colonel and Mr. Ferdinand, who had spent weeks searching among the fallen stones for the legendary treasure. Their laughter

jarred upon her spirit. To her it seemed that there was something sacred in the place. She felt that she was connected with the mystery of these silent walls, and faint memories of loving hands that had guided her childish footsteps along the shores stirred within her, until, in the sadness of the promptings that came unknown to her from the blood of an Inca mother, she wept.

As she stood there a gentle touch made her look down, and through her tears she saw again, as she had seen before in her sadness, the great brown eyes of the little boy.

"Always," he said, after a pause, "it makes me cry too. There comes a sound out of the water, and whispering from the walls. I heard it up in the mountain; and the birds over there talk and talk of the people under the water."

"Does it make you sad, little Jack? Are you not afraid to come here?"

"It is here I play, for the little boys will not follow here. Oh, yes, a many days I have been here, looking, looking at the water."

"Poor little lonely boy!"

"I not been lone," he said, with a mysterious glance around, "the birds talk with me."

He looked up at her, and she did not smile.

"Will you tell if I show you something?"

"No, Jack."

He took her by the hand and led her into a great hall, over the fallen stones into another, then to a corner of the wall, where a stone had fallen out, leaving a large hole.

"There's my parrot. I'm keeping it for brother. I found him, and I feed him, and we talk."

Marion looked in and met the grey, wise, cunning eyes of an old, old parrot, so old that its head was bald, and the feathers of the wings were frayed. The bird shuffled along, twisted his head round, regarding Marion

with its bright eyes, then in quavering notes cried "Tupac! Tupac!"

"That name," she murmured, with her hand to her head, "where have I heard it?"

"That's funny," said Jack. "He never said that before."

CHAPTER XVII

THE SUN CIRCLE

FOR Mr. Milcent there was no sleep on that first night. His brain was excited by the rich feast that was spread out for him in the singular sign of the lake, in the ruins with their sign language, and their geometrical ornamentation, and above all in that massive pyramid based on cyclopean cubes. Before sunrise he was pacing along the shores of the lake, and at the first light of dawn he had climbed to the square top of the pyramid. On the top was a raised circle of hard, smooth rock about three feet in circumference, with a cone, sharply cut and symmetrically rising from the centre about three inches in height. The astronomer gave a cry of delight when he saw this.

"A sun circle," he murmured; "the Ynti-huatana of the Incas for astronomical observations. In a beautiful state of preservation. Perfect indeed, quite perfect." He looked, shading his eyes with his hand, from the stone to the sun. "How extraordinary!" he cried, for the rising orb appeared on the left through a gap in the wall of the valley. "That gap must have been made purposely," and he turned round to face the west. But on the west the face of the cliff rose high; so high that he saw that in the afternoon the spot where he stood would be in the shade, a circumstance which made him wonder that the Incas should have reared a sun circle at such a place. Regarding the smooth surface of the circle he discerned faint lines, which he judged were

meridian lines, and he was busy endeavouring to decipher other faint outlines, when a hand was laid on his arm, and he found Colonel Colston peering over his shoulder.

"Do you know what this stone is intended for?" asked the Colonel harshly.

"Yes, sir," said the student, taking off his glasses to polish them, as little moved by the other's sudden appearance as if he had been a beetle, "this is a dial, or sun circle, by means of which the Inca priests took the altitude of the sun, ascertained the time of the summer and winter solstice, and arranged their calendar. I was endeavouring to trace what were most likely meridian lines, but which have apparently been obliterated, together with other marks, by human agency. If you glance along the level of the dial, you will see that some friction has been applied to the surface, though how any one could have been guilty of the sacrilege of destroying a very perfect figure of human skill and study, is beyond my imagination."

"Ah!" hissed the Colonel between his teeth. "You think this was an astronomical figure? I remember having seen lines and circles when I last saw the stone, and, as you say, they have been removed, and that recently."

"There can be no doubt of its origin, but I am puzzled at its position. Observe this gnomon in the centre is perpendicular to the horizon, through yonder gap. But what amazes me is that the ancient astronomers should have selected a site from which they could not observe the declining phases of the sun, as the cliff on the west would throw the sun-dial into the shade. It seems to me, therefore, that this sun circle, or, as they call it, a Ynti-huatana, was for some subsidiary purpose; either for partial observations or for some religious ceremony."

"Do you think," said the Colonel indifferently, "that you could retrace the obliterated lines?" while he reflected that this sun-dial might hold the clue to the treasure.

"Certainly I could, as well as the lines of the summer and winter solstice."

The Colonel stood for some time watching Mr Milcent, as with the aid of a strong magnifier that gentleman now bent over the smooth stone, and again compared the well-defined shadow from the gnomon with his watch.

"Suppose," he said, "that the lines you think were traced on the dial were in relation to the objects in the valley—the site of the temple, for instance, and the correct position of other works that would be treasure by the Incas—do you think you could follow their scheme?"

"Only by marking the position of the temple and other objects, and ascertaining if they were in line with the defined points of the compass. Now, for instance you see that a line from the rising sun passes direct over this circle to a cleft in the cliff beyond."

"Yes, it is so. I wonder I never observed that before. You would oblige me very much, Mr. Milcent, if you would restore the lines of the circle, bearing in view one important fact, that the Incas regulated the site of the buildings by astronomical observation, and that several interesting gold plates from the Temple of the Sun have been hidden in some secret place whose whereabouts was most probably indicated by the lines on this circle. Now I have here a sketch of another sun circle, which may guide you in your work," and he produced an exact sketch taken from the gold disc he had shown to Mr Dunell.

"This may be of great value to me," said Mr. Milcent after a close inspection, "but before saying anything further I will wait until noon, when I will take an observation of the sun from this spot, and work out the meridian. From that basis I can perhaps do much, but I will be most careful, most careful. It will be most congenial work—indeed, I could wish for no better."

"That is right; there is plenty of time before you."

With your permission I will occasionally watch your progress. Now let us go back to breakfast."

"So," he muttered, as he went back with Mr. Milcent, walking with hands clasped behind him and bent head, "that is why Ferdinand did not wish me to climb that pyramid. He has studied these signs and obliterated them for his own purpose. Very well, if he will play for his own hand against me, it will be just as well if I know the value of his cards."

As they neared the quinta Captain Gomez came forward to meet them.

"I have news of the Señor Elmore, your Excellency."

"Well?"

"He is with El Demonio in the Montana; and they have assembled a band of Indians, who have already danced the war dance."

"For what purpose have they gathered?"

"Why? To attack your Excellency."

"They must have short memories, Gomez, to have forgotten so soon the lesson we taught them. You look disturbed. Are you afraid they will not fight?"

"I tell your Excellency that he whom men call El Demonio is with the Indians."

"Is he a person of importance, then?"

"He is an Indian—and yet not an Indian. They say he is of the Incas, and that his word is law among the savages."

"I thought we had heard the last of the Incas," said the Colonel, with a dark look.

Gomez glanced down as the Colonel passed his hand over his eyes.

"What sort of man is this Indian leader? Is he old?"

"He is young; but though young, he is old in cunning and terrible in his hate. Surely your Excellency has heard of the man who has hunted down and killed five of our band in so many years—five out of six!"

"And who is the sixth, Gomez?"

"I am that one," said the Captain quietly, while his dark eyes examined the other's face.

"You, Gomez? Is there then any one so rash as to seek your life? And why should he single out six?"

"Why? Oh, sacred Mother! Why?" said Gomez, in hollow tones. "Does your Excellency wish to know?"

The Colonel started.

"Speak!" he commanded harshly.

"There were six who took the lady and her boy into the woods. I am the sixth."

The Colonel went grey. Then he straightened himself, saying quietly: "Not six, Gomez. There were seven, and I who gave the order am the seventh. If he seeks your life, he must, with more cause, seek mine."

"Your Excellency says it, and so it is. I would advise humbly that a troop be sent forth into the Montana to disperse the Indians and to seize this man."

"Why seize him?"

"Would your Excellency have him shot? He is a young man and handsome, and great in spirit. He might do service for your Excellency, as his knowledge of the country and the old people who lived here is greater than that of any man living."

"It was not my wish to make war on these people, Gomez. But if I must fight, understand I will make no prisoners. If you deal leniently with them, they never recognise you as a master, and will attack again. Send out spies at once to watch their movements, and get ready twenty picked men. I will lead them myself if the savages advance, and put an end once for all to their schemes."

"It is the will of God," muttered Gomez, as he saluted and went slowly to the toldos.

On the verandah of the quinta was Mr. Ferdinand, smoking the inevitable cigar.

"By the way, Colonel," he said, "Gomez has no doubt told you that the Indians are moving?"

"He has, and it occurs to me, Ferdinand, that you had better lead a troop of our men against them."

"Thanks, very much. But I have no desire to enter the Montana, still less since you have provided me with such charming society; and though Marion is not very gracious, yet I prefer her in her most chilling manner to the chance of meeting El Demonio."

"What, are you, too, afraid of the scoundrel?" and the Colonel raised his eyebrows.

"Afraid is rather a strong word, my Colonel; but since you put it in that light, I admit I am afraid of that scoundrel, as you justly call him, and I say that no man who has met him, or heard of his deeds, can be other than afraid."

Colonel Colston smiled.

"I think," he said, "I had better meet the demon myself."

Ferdinand started, and for an instant a look of triumph flashed from his dark eyes, to be succeeded by an expression of horror.

"Don't!" he said feebly. "I would rather go myself."

"What do you mean?" said the Colonel sternly. "Gomez tried to dissuade me. Have you got the impudence to think that I have passed my fighting days?"

"Heaven forbid," said the other, "but we want you here."

"You want me here," repeated the Colonel, with concentrated bitterness. "I do not think you would regret very much if you were left in the sole enjoyment of the valley and all it holds."

"Think what you like, Colonel Colston, but believe that I am doing you the best service a man could in warning you against meeting that Indian in battle."

"Were he the foul fiend himself," said the Colonel coldly, "I would face him now."

He turned on his heel, paced with a stiff military stride to the gate, and beckoned to Gomez.

"Captain Gomez, are you sure of your information about the Indians?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"How far off are they?"

"Two days' march, no farther; due south."

"Have twenty men in readiness, with three days' rations, and fifty rounds each. Arrange also that Lieutenant Pedro follows to-morrow with extra ammunition and ten men. Tell him where to rendezvous, and take two runners to keep him in touch."

"A good place for him to hold would be the second pajnale in the forest, where your Excellency speared the jaguar."

"Let it be so." And the Colonel stroked his grey moustaches. "I was a younger man when I killed the jaguar. I doubt not whether I am not too old for that work now, Gomez," and he glanced at the Captain through half-closed eyelids.

"Your Excellency's muscles are of iron, and your eyes have not lost their keenness. The men were saying so in the night. They remembered that your name was 'El Tigre,' and the tiger grows more terrible with age."

"Well, they will have an opportunity of judging. I will lead them myself. Eh? What are you muttering?"

"I was thinking," said the Captain, fidgeting with his hands, "that I may be mistaken about the Indians, and it would be a pity to take your Excellency into the forest so soon."

"Come, what is your real reason?"

Gomez looked up with a troubled glance.

"It is my place to meet El Demonio first."

"Be ready with your men in an hour's time." And the Colonel stalked away with a look of high displeasure.

As he took his place at the breakfast table a little voice challenged him with a question.

"Have you found my bruvver yet, like you said you would?"

He looked at the small brown face for a moment until the large eyes dropped under the hard stare. "Not yet, little man, but I am going to look for him to-day."

"Are you going to leave us," said Miss Dunell, "already?"

"Only for a few days."

"What a relief," murmured Mrs. Milcent.

"It is no light business," said the Colonel, after a steady look at the little lady, "Mr. Elmore is in the hands of hostile Indians."

"In the hands of the Indians! Indians. Do you mean savages?"

"That is right, Miss Dunell. I would be glad of your powerful aid to prevent his going on the expedition," said Ferdinand, with a meaning look.

"I do not think it would be right to his visitors if he went," she said, with great displeasure. "I am sure Miss Colston will support me?"

"Perhaps you did not hear," whispered Marion, "that Mr. Elmore's life is in danger."

"But your father——" began Miss Dunell, and stopped.

"My father is responsible for whatever danger Mr. Elmore may be in," and the daughter fixed her glance on her father's unmoved face.

"I shall leave," said the Colonel calmly, "in an hour, and shall be back within six days. There is not the slightest shadow of danger to any one of you here, and Mr. Ferdinand will, I am sure, more than compensate for my absence."

Ferdinand's gaze went involuntarily to Miss Dunell, who sat with a slight frown.

"I will do my best," he said, with a bow, and he left the room. The others withdrew, too, leaving the Colonel alone with her.

"What would you think," he continued, after looking long at her, "should I tell you that I am going out into the Montana against the Indians, to prove to myself

and my men and to you, that I have lost none of the skill or the hardihood or the endurance of my youth? It is folly, perhaps, but all love is folly. Come," he added, with a glow in his face that made him look young, "give me some favour to wear.

"Marion," he said, beckoning to his daughter, who had looked in at the door, and was retreating with an expression of mingled amazement and anger on her face, "you have heard of the man called 'El Demonio'; tell Miss Dunell what his reputation is."

"His reputation," said Marion, in a choking voice, with her head turned, "is, from the little I know, that of a bold, vindictive, and cunning outlaw. But why do you ask?"

"Why, my dear? Because he is in command of the Indians, and I wish to show I am his superior; the result of vanity and—love."

"Is Mr. Elmore in that man's power?" she gasped.

"I believe so," said he, with a smile at Miss Dunell. "That will do, Marion. Now, Beatrice, will you believe that an old man can feel the power of romance, and will you give me some favour?"

She took a scarlet flower from her corset, the cantaul sacred flower of the Incas, and pinned it to his coat. It was a flower that had been given her by Mr. Ferdinand that morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE MONTANA

AT twelve o'clock Mr. Milcent was at the sun circle, taking the position of the sun as a preliminary step to the restoration of the obliterated lines. And at that hour Captain Gomez had drawn up his twenty men for the inspection of the Colonel, who came out of the quinta accompanied by the ladies, Mr. Ferdinand, and little Jack.

The men had replaced their heavy boots with heelless shoes of untanned leather. In addition to a rifle and ammunition, each man carried a machete, a bag of chumas, or potatoes, first frozen, then compressed and dried for long journeys, and a smaller bag, filled equally with tobacco and coca leaves. That formed their rations, and the poncho their blanket or tent, as necessity might demand. They were a picked lot of men, of various shades of colour, and of a ferocious type.

The Colonel did not long remain over the leave-taking. A sharp word of command sent the men swinging by the toldos, where their women-folk, in crimson shirts and white skirts, gave them a parting clap and a pious good-bye, with a still more fervent hope that they would send El Demonio back to his rightful home. Then he said a brief good-bye to Mrs. Milcent, and lingered a moment with Miss Dunell. As the men went by they had saluted her, and there was a look of pride in her eyes.

"Are you pleased with them?"

"As ferocious a band of picturesque ruffians as ever

I have seen on the operatic stage," said Mrs. Milcent. "But you, Colonel, have not the air of a bandit. I wonder how you trust yourself alone with them."

"Do I look an infant, Beatrice?" he said, twisting his grey moustaches.

"You look every inch a soldier," she said, with a trace of feeling.

"And you," he whispered, "every inch a queen."

He stooped to kiss her hand in a gallant manner, and then saluting, went with a light step after his men, the women calling out after him many admiring and affectionate farewells, in their southern way.

"He called you 'Beatrice,' my dear," said Mrs. Milcent.

"Why not, aunt? So does uncle."

"Ah, but he is not your uncle, and he looked positively young. His manner was very gallant, and he is going for Mr. Elmore. My dear Beatrice, we are not in Kensington, and Colonel Colston has us very much in his power. You should not try experiments with a man like that, for, in my opinion, he is a dangerous man to play with."

Beatrice laughed a low, pleased laugh, and went back to the quinta to lounge and dream in a hammock.

As the Colonel entered the narrow path that went winding through the plantations, he came upon his daughter and Jack.

"Father," said she, "I wish to speak to you. Run on, Jack."

"Well, Marion, what is it? About Ferdinand?"

"It is about Mr. Elmore. Father, you know he has been treated with horrible treachery."

"Have a care, Marion," he said quietly, "in the use of your words."

"Oh," she cried, "why do you force me to speak against you? You would let me see your design. You wished me to participate in it, and I say Mr. Elmore has been treacherously deceived. I did what I could to warn him."

"You!"

"Yes," she answered proudly. "I did, and if I can I will help him again. But there is something more—something more terrible—I saw. I could not help seeing that you—oh, must I say it?—were making love to Miss Dunell."

"I was," he said. "Why not?"

"But, father—she—Mr. Elmore—you must not come between them."

"Have you quite finished with your instructions?"

"My instructions! Oh, no, my prayer—that you may be just to yourself and not to destroy the happiness of a man who has already been so cruelly wronged. I ask this by all that is sacred—by the memory of my mother."

"My God!" he muttered, while a frightful spasm distorted his face. Then with difficulty he regained his composure. "Do you remember her?" he said, in a whisper.

"You have never spoken to me of her," she said sadly.

"Nor ever will."

She looked at him, noted his frowning brows, the rigid mouth, and hard, grey eyes, and sighed. Never yet had she been able to break through the barrier between them, never yet win a smile of affection from those stern lips, and a soft look from those keen, cold eyes.

"But you will think of what I have said?" she whispered.

"I will do what I have marked out to do," he said calmly. "Good-bye."

He strode away, and she followed to find Jack, with despair and bitterness at her heart. Then she paused, scarcely breathing, for the little boy stood in the path just ahead, turned as if to stone by terror, his large eyes held spell-bound by the glittering eyes of a jararaca. The diamond-shaped head of the deadly snake was on a level with the boy's face, and the slight sinewy neck and flame-coloured head were dancing the dance of death in an undulatory movement from side to side.

Colonel Colston, arrested by the sight, stood a moment irresolute under the sway of the dark thoughts that tormented his soul, then he gave a slight hiss, and the jararaca stiffened as if frozen, though its black silken forked tongue flickered through its grim jaws. In that moment the Colonel drew his revolver, fired, then with a swoop of his hand caught Jack, and swung him up to his shoulder. The snake was confused by the report and near passage of the bullet, and flashed its death-dealing fangs a second too late. They missed the boy and struck the skirt of the Colonel's coat, passing right through. Dropping his revolver, he caught the slender neck in his grasp, tore it away, and held it out writhing.

Marion, running up, took Jack in her arms, and her father despatched the jararaca.

"It is dead, little chap, quite dead, don't be afraid." Jack tried to pull himself together, with a feeble smile, then fell back in a faint.

"Poor little boy! He is very weak, Marion. Just a drop of brandy. There! Now carry him away out of this, so that when he recovers he will not be reminded of the snake. His age—just his age," he muttered.

Without a second look, he strode rapidly off, and Marion, with a sob, carried Jack out from the waving green maize to higher ground, where he quickly recovered, though the terrible shock left him still weak.

"When I was going along," he said, starting up at her, "the snake said in a whisper, 'Stop, little boy,' and I stopped. See? So I stopped to look. 'Stand still, little boy,' he said, 'and I will dance.' Then I stood and he danced; and the fire from his eyes ran up and down my body, so as I got hot and cold. And I knew the big man was there, but I could not turn round, and he caught me by the arm and hurted it. I was very frightened, oh, yes—but when I get big, me and the big man will frighten the Big Thing in the water."

"Let us go and speak to the parrot," she said, kissing him.

"You know what I told you of the Big Thing in the sea," he went on solemnly. "Well, it's here now, in the lake. I seen it, and the swans seen it. When the sun is red on the water I seen its head in the warm, and its tongue went in and out like the tongue of that little snake, only bigger; and it came along through the water like a shadow to look at me, but the parrot beat its wings on my face, and cried, and I runned away. The parrot cried, 'Huala-ala-huala,' like that; and the swans cried, and I runned away. Oh, yes."

"Are you dreaming, little Jack?" she said, with wonder in her eyes.

"I seen its head in the warm of the sun, all black and gold, and the shadow of its body in the water like a big tree, and its starry eyes all fixed."

She shuddered. "You must not go out by yourself any more, Jack. Now take me to the old parrot; but first we will go to the house and get a gun—a nice, light little gun, that you can fire off while I hold it."

Half an hour later Miss Colston was giving Jack shooting lessons in the hall of the ruined palace, while the aged parrot from its niche in the wall eyed them both with a leering eye, and kept up a string of words in an unknown tongue.

Colonel Colston found his men waiting for him at the junction of the two artificial channels where the united waters poured through a deep and narrow opening into the broad river. Towards evening they reached the large natural clearing which had been given as a rendezvous for Lieut. Pedro, and here they camped, making, however, no fire until the darkness set in. At the first shadow of the night swarms of huge bats emerged from their hiding-places and commenced their swift whirling in pursuit of the myriad insects, while the silence was broken by the bull-voiced ox-bird, and the howling of silver-grey monkeys.

The men stretched themselves around the fires, being careful to leave no part of the body exposed to the

investigation of the leaf-nosed vampire. The sentries, each one behind a tree, stood motionless, and the wizened Chino guide, after a careful cast round, curled himself up with the assurance that "los savages" had not left their encampment yet. Soon all were still, with the exception of one man, and he paced slowly to and fro, his hands clasped behind him, and the glow of his cigar showing steady amid the giddy circling of innumerable fire-flies. The gloom and forbidding melancholy of the forest, with the wailing cries of its creatures, opened anew the wound that his daughter had bared, and into his iron soul there struggled a feeling of remorse for the suffering of the woman he had sent into its terrible depths to perish in an agony of terror.

How clearly she came before him! The small, graceful figure, with the blue-black hair, that reached in two plaits almost to her knees, the delicate, oval face, the large eyes, deep-fringed and downcast, the small mouth, the folded hands, as she stood before him when he accused her. He passed his hand over his eyes, but he could not blot out the image of the little brown-faced boy, with the small, hooked nose, who clung to his mother's skirt, and looked boldly up at him at the sound of his harsh voice.

"My little Tupac!" he muttered. "Ah, my God! Huala, why were you not true, and I had been spared this hideous memory! And I thought I had forgotten—forgotten! Huala, my love yet—Tupac, my child."

Out of the darkness there came a whisper, "Huala!"

He moistened his lips, and answered back, "Huala!" then stood listening, while the beating of his heart shook his frame. Who was it who spoke? What awful mystery did the darkness conceal? Plainly he had heard the whisper, soft and low, in the tones he remembered well.

"Are you there?" he whispered. But there was no answer, though he waited long. "I am getting fanciful. It was nothing—nothing; how could it be?" and he glanced around.

"Huala! Huala!" He heard it again, soft and piteous, receding from him towards the farther side of the little prairie. He shuddered, then, with a damp brow and clenched teeth, he started after, till the wall of the forest stopped him.

"Come no farther," said a deep voice, in low and menacing accents.

Colonel Colston, brave man as he was, started back with a cry, so great was the shock of this sudden speech.

"Who are you?" he gasped hoarsely.

"Listen and heed. Go back. By the spirit you followed, by the name you spoke, by the wife you wronged and sacrificed to the terrors of the forest, I warn you. Go! Leave the forest and the country."

"In the devil's name, who are you?"

"You have named me!"

"El Demonio?"

"So men call me."

"Was it you I followed?"

"Ask me no questions."

"A demon you must be to play such a hellish trick. Come out, coward and dog that you are—out from your hiding, to receive the death you deserve."

"Do you ask me?" said the other in hollow tones.

Before the Colonel could reply a rifle cracked from behind, and the bullet whistled by him in the direction of the voice. One of the sentries, hearing the voices, had crossed the prairie and fired. The Colonel turned upon him in his anger, then dashed into the forest, but neither he nor the man could hear the slightest sound, and though the other members of the troop joined in the search nothing came of it. The man who had fired sent the whisper round that El Demonio had visited the camp, and the men began to mutter among themselves.

"Was it our enemy?" asked Gomez.

"He or some other fiend," said the Colonel, who was white with passion.

"It is a bad beginning. The men are saying that

it is an omen—that it is the voice of the dead!” And Gomez crossed himself.

The Colonel swore under his breath and ordered the men back to the encampment. He knew better how to deal with them when the victims of dark superstition than to dragoon them, and mastering his passion he went back to the fires, talking cheerfully to Gomez. Then he took the guide aside and questioned him closely about the position of the Indian camp.

“My men,” he said, “this is no place for us, we must go.”

The men gave vent to a unanimous outburst of their satisfaction, and they fell into line.

“We must go before the dawn. The Indian spy has found us here. He is now returning to his friends to give them warning of our coming. They will then ambush the path, lying in wait for us. Instead, however, of ourselves falling into an ambush we will get before them and lie in wait for them. The guide will lead, with myself next, and each man will follow in line, toe to heel, Captain Gomez bringing up the rear. If any man remains behind or falls out evil will befall him. Silence! March!”

The men stepped off, afraid to go but more afraid to stay, and answering at once to the sway of the only one amongst them who was not afraid. The guide hit off unerringly the narrow pathway, and very soon the long file of men were hemmed in by the living walls of the forest, advancing slowly in a gloom so intense that the rear files could not see their covering men, but keeping their position by grasping the muzzle of each other's rifle, held on the trail. Another hour they walked, until the sweet low notes of the organista cheered them with the fulfilment of the dawn. They halted then, and the Colonel went on alone with the guide for a short distance. When he returned he ordered the men into the forest, half on either side the track, and by crawling often they advanced for about a quarter of a mile to



VERY SOON THE LEADERS OF THE BAND CAME INTO VIEW

where the track opened out into a small glade, which had evidently been cleared for a camping ground. On either side the men took up their position, the four men on each side being posted deeper in the wood, and at right angles to their comrades, to prevent the Indians outflanking when they rushed for shelter.

It was not long before the Colonel's estimate of the enemy's tactics was verified, for soon after his men were posted, two Indians entered the little glade from the other direction, and passed on, totally unconscious of the ambushade. Very soon the leaders of the band came into view, two warriors armed with rifles. After them, in single files, followed ten others with rifles, then more with blow-pipes. They were halted in the glade, evidently to enable the stragglers to come in. They were small men, with animated black eyes, aquiline noses and thin lips, and they suddenly stood alert like startled antelopes, as a long quavering cry came down the path. Then they sprang high with a shrill yell, as from the silent wood there thundered the word, "Fire!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE INDIANS

FEW troops, not even the most seasoned, can stand the terrible shock of a sudden surprise. As a murderous volley crashed from one side the Indians rushed from the opposite shelter to be met by another more deadly discharge, and then they dashed back, those who were uninjured, into the forest, to be completely disheartened and scattered by the fire from the flanking outposts. The band of ferocious mulattoes and Zambo negroes completed their task in their usual fashion by despatching the wounded, and they were rifling the contents of a litter which had been dropped at the far outlet to the glade when the Colonel intervened. There was a sick man in the litter, and the Colonel stooped to see who it was.

"My God!" he said, as he peered in, "is that you, Elmore?"

The sick man raised himself on his elbow, took in the whole scene in one bright, feverish glance—the motionless forms of the dead, the brutal faces of the exultant gauchos, then fixed his burning glance on the Colonel's hard face.

"You devil!" he muttered, made an effort to rise, and then fell back exhausted.

Colonel Colston grasped the sick man's wrist, and looked into his haggard, worn face as he counted the pulse beats.

"You require nursing," he said calmly. "It's a good thing I found you in time. Your little brother will be

glad to see you back, and the sooner we get you out of the forest the better."

Elmore feebly put his hand to his brow.

"Don't worry, just lie back and rest. Gomez, this is my friend; he has fever, and must be taken back at once to the quinta. Take four men with you to carry him, and see that they carry him gently. You will meet Pedro on the way, tell him to encamp where we did last night and await my coming. I will reach him tomorrow."

"I should like to remain with your Excellency," said Gomez.

"In that case, Gomez, you may send Pedro with this gentleman, and yourself take command of his men; but warn Pedro that if he does not deliver him safe he will answer for it with his life. And tell him further to let none but Miss Colston know of this man's presence, to tell her that she must attend to him secretly till I arrive, in a hut, away from the quinta."

In half an hour the Colonel gave the order to advance, guarding against a surprise by sending ahead six men, skilled in woodcraft, with instructions to keep well in the wood on either side the path. The Indians, however, had been too severely handled to think of an attack, and the little column, after an hour's slow marching, reached a more open country, through which the men rapidly advanced into a prairie with a huaca or burial mound in the centre, near which, it was evident from the signs, a large body of Indians had camped. The column was halted here while the little Chino guide and two Zambo negroes set off to make a careful examination of the tracks. In a marvellously short time they decided that the Indians had broken into two bands, one of which they had accounted for, while the other, starting earlier, had made for the forest at an angle which would bring them into the wood a couple of miles above the path just followed.

Once again the march was resumed on this last track,

and now that the men's faces were turned homewards they stepped out briskly. One evil-looking mulatto made a remark aimed at the Colonel's stiff joints, which drew a laugh from some and a rebuke from others. The Colonel overheard the joke and smiled grimly. Presently, as the men wished to slow down, feeling the heat on the unsheltered prairie, he quickened the pace until their yellow and black skins shone with moisture. And when they at last entered the shade of the wood they were denied the rest they had anticipated. The big mulatto with an oath fell out of the ranks, and declared that he meant to rest, at the same time calling to his friends to stop.

"We are doing the work," he said, "let us do it as suits us best;" and he began to roll a cigarette.

The other men stopped, but the Colonel caught up the mulatto's rifle.

"March!" he said, looking them down with a glance they could not meet.

As they stepped off the mulatto, with an uneasy laugh, rose to his feet.

"You wish to stop. You will stop. Sit down!"

The fellow sat down, fingering his knife.

"Stay there; and if you follow before we are out of sight I will shoot you with your own rifle." The Colonel shouldered the rifle and followed the others, who were lingering and looking back.

"The slower you go," he said, "the worse it will be for him. March, you dogs!" They quickened their pace, but before they had covered a hundred yards, there was a yell from the mulatto left behind.

"The savages!" he cried, and looking back they saw him running. "Don't shoot," he screamed, for the Colonel had thrown up the rifle, "I am——" But he spoke no more, for he pitched headlong with a bullet through his heart, and Colonel Colston, with the rifle still smoking, walked back to the fallen man. As he stooped over him, a tiny dart whizzed by his head, and another

struck the ground. Such a dart he pulled from the dead man's shoulder. The men, coming back, looked at it and at the forest, shuddering. It was the dreaded poisoned arrow, no longer than a foot, blown from the cebatana—blow-gun—the long tube fashioned from the chanta palm. They did not think of the dead man, but of themselves, and they had the wild aspect of soldiers on the eve of a panic.

Another dart flew into the trees, and a third pricked a man in the hand. Clapping his hand to his mouth he glared back down the path, then drawing his machete he darted back with a yell to a spot where there gleamed from the wood a long polished tube. They heard his furious oaths in the wood. They saw several lithe forms flit across the path, then they saw him reel out, dragging an Indian by his war-lock, and plunging his knife again and again into the shrinking body. At the sight two other men dashed back yelling, to be met by a shower of darts.

"Forward!" said the Colonel, "forward! It is death to enter the wood. Your time will come later."

They gave one glance behind, where the first man struck was already staggering like a drunken man, saw the other two dash into the forest, heard the cries of the Indians, then went on with bloodshot eyes.

The cries of the unequal fight behind were soon muffled by the dense curtain of trees, and soon, after a gloomy spell of silence, they heard again the soft foot-fall of the pursuers as they came running down the path. "Don't look back," cried the Colonel sternly.

There was another flight of darts, insignificant, but more to be dreaded than a bullet, and one of the Indians in his excitement outran his discretion. Before he could turn the Colonel shot him through the head with his revolver, and at the sound of the report the men stopped again.

"Forward!" cried the Colonel again, his face looking haggard and aged.

"No, señor," they said, "we will fight here. We are tired of running."

"They want you to stand, you fools! Don't you see that they have all the advantage?"

"We have been driven enough," exclaimed a Maztizo passionately.

"Ay, we are not mules," cried another.

"You are children," said the Colonel. "When the ground is good I will stand, but here you could not find a worse spot. Come, I hear the Indians passing through the woods to head us off. That means that they are afraid we will reach a favourable ground. Listen and you will hear them."

"His Excellency is right," said two men, who had before acted well. "The savages are passing," and they moved on.

The men pulled themselves together, and followed the lead given them, but they did so sullenly, and the Colonel was deciding that he would have to put his authority to another desperate test when the scout met them.

"Have you found an open space?"

"Yes, your Excellency. The prairie we were in last night is near."

"And Gomez—with his men?"

The guide paused, glancing at the sullen, mutinous faces of the men. "His men are there," he said, with a flickering of his eyelids.

"Do you hear, men? The prairie is near. There you can stand and fight. One more effort, and you will have the upper hand."

The men with a cry struggled on, and the guide came close to the Colonel.

"Your Excellency," he whispered, "Gomez and his men are there, but they sleep."

"Sleep!"

"Yes, never to wake. El Demonio has visited them."

The Colonel started, and then his brow came down.

"It will be a bad time for you and me when these

fellows find it out. They are in the mood to turn upon their friends. When they halt see that the men I can depend upon stand together."

"Your Excellency," whispered the little man, with a cunning look, "if you follow me, we could give them the slip."

The Colonel laughed. "That would not do," he said; "but if you see your way to escape, take it."

The guide shook his head and slipped forward among the men, who, now having their minds set on a definite object, were pushing forward as fast as they could, and presently, as the forest grew open, they broke into a run until they were well out into the prairie, when they flung themselves panting on the grass. The guide plucked the Colonel by the sleeve and pointed to the far corner of the prairie. There in the shadow of the woods were several dark forms lying motionless, and above them on a withered branch a number of vultures.

"They have been dead since the early morning," he whispered; "and there is some one watching, else the vultures would have descended to the feast."

One of the band, seeing the two looking with anxious faces, stood up and marked the motionless forms and the foul birds.

"Mother of God!" he screamed. "Look!"

The others sprang to their feet, and their wild, startled glances ranging round were arrested also by the distant forms.

"Esta muertas!" (they are dead) was the cry, and then with fierce looks they turned on the Colonel, who stood with folded arms.

"You have mocked us," said one. "You said you would find Gomez and our comrades; and the gallinagos sit above dead men."

"And so will die those who do not obey orders. I bade Gomez be watchful, and his men must have slept."

"It has been planned," cried another hoarsely; "the

white man who was with the savages was sent into safety."

"Ay, and last night," growled another, "El Demonio had speech here. For what reason if it was not to plan this treachery?"

The Colonel made a sign to the guide, and he, having whispered a word to the trusted men, came behind his leader with six followers. It was a critical position, and as the men were hesitating their attention was called off.

A wild scream broke from the forest, fierce and terrifying, and as they all turned to look they saw a magnificent jaguar leap out into the open and then crouch a few feet from one of the bodies.

"El tigre!" was the cry.

CHAPTER XX

EL TIGERO

THE men were at heart keen sportsmen, and the Colonel struck a note that won their sympathy and turned aside their fury.

"Look!" he said, pointing to the jaguar. "It was such a beast I slew here single-handed with a machete. Give me a knife and I will meet this one."

A dozen blades flashed from their sheaths. He took one, and examined the ground to see how he could best approach. The jaguar was distant about two hundred yards, almost hidden, as it crouched, by the grass, and the only way to reach it without being observed was by skirting the wood. As the Colonel was about to move off for the cover, the jaguar rose and stared at the cluster of men out in the prairie.

"Holy Mother! El tigero!" cried one of the men, in suppressed tones.

"Eh!" said the little guide, in a tone of wonder, "El tigero!"

"Where?" said the Colonel, whose eyes were not so keen as his far-sighted followers.

"By the tree, señor; to the right of the jaguar."

The men drew up together in their excitement, and, with the Colonel, looked with breathless interest at the figure of the man who had stepped out of the wood beyond the fierce brute, and about twenty paces from it. They forgot everything, even their own danger, in the anticipation of seeing fought out before them one of the

most dangerous combats that man, in his daring, enters upon of his own will—that, namely, of a combat between the fiercest beast that roams the forest and a man armed only with a short spear or shorter knife.

The “tigero” upon whom their eyes were fixed was an Indian—short, broad-shouldered, naked to the waist, with his long black hair braided into a pigtail. He carried in his right hand a short spear, and in his left a machete. As the jaguar still stared at the cluster of men, he moved imperceptibly forward. The brute must have heard, for suddenly it turned its head, and the watchers saw by the sudden flattening of its ears against its huge, round head that it saw its enemy. For several moments there was no movement on either side. The jaguar stood with its head turned over its shoulder, regarding the man fixedly, and the latter remained as if rooted to the spot. Then the jaguar turned to face the daring intruder, its tail slightly jerking, and its head thrust down and forward. The silent, motionless duel was again fought out, while the sweat poured off the faces of the watchers. Still the man never moved a muscle. His arms were rigid, his right leg outstretched. The brute raised its head, sniffed the air, then with a low, menacing growl moved stealthily a few paces nearer, then stood again, as if debating whether that silent, motionless object was really a living man. The sun shone along its rich, dark coat, and the knotted muscles on its shoulder and forearm rippled under the light. Suddenly it turned away, moved slowly towards the wood, then as suddenly turned and ran swiftly a few yards, its yellow belly almost touching the ground. But the man never moved under that ordeal, and when scarcely two yards away, the jaguar stopped and sank to the ground.

“If the brute springs now the tigero is a dead man,” muttered the Colonel.

“But see, señor, the Indian moves not. His heart is of iron.”

"Ay, he is a brave man," said the Colonel. "If he moves he is lost."

The tigero did not move, and the jaguar, instead of springing, again stood up, and, after another long stare, moved forward inch by inch, until its broad muzzle touched the man's leg. Then the motionless figure took life; swift as a serpent strikes, his spear flashed.

"Missed!" cried the Colonel.

"No, señor, but it is only a skin wound."

The jaguar had sprung aside, snapped with its gaping jaws at the haft of the spear as it hung from his shoulder, then with an appalling scream sprang straight at the man, who, as soon as he had struck, sprang back also, shifting his knife to his right hand. As the fierce brute sprang, he fell on his left hand, struck upwards at the white breast, and in the same motion rolled over.

"Bravo! Bravo!" yelled the men, following the Colonel, who had started running.

The jaguar missed his mark, rolled over, recovered, and with another scream, gathered itself for the last spring, when a ball from the Colonel's rifle stretched it in its death struggle.

The Indian leapt to his feet, glanced at the running men, marked the smoke curling from the Colonel's rifle, then bounded into the wood, while bullets whistled and smacked against the trees behind him.

"Why did you shoot?" said the Colonel, confronting his men. "He is a brave man."

"Señor," said the guide, "that man is El Demonio. We did not know until we saw his eyes."

"His eyes!"

"Yes, señor. They are not like those of an Indian, but light and terrible, like—" he hesitated, "like yours, señor."

The men fell back, handling their rifles as if they feared an attack, and Colonel Colston advanced alone to where the jaguar lay still quivering near the dead men. Dead and stark they were, ten in all, four of them shot

where they were seated at their food, the rest bearing the marks of spear and knife cuts, scattered about over a space of some fifty yards.

He went from one to the other, but could see no trace of Gomez, until a weak voice called him, and he found the Captain lashed to a tree within the edge of the forest. At once he cut the thongs, caught the man in his arms, and bore him out into the open, where he gave him a mouthful of spirit from his flask.

Gomez gulped the spirit down, then looked mournfully at his dead comrades, while tears ran down his rugged cheeks.

"Mother of God!" he muttered, "all dead—all—and a few hours ago they were full of life. I am a child—a baby—and he has given me my life to mock me."

"This won't do, Gomez. Pull yourself together, man."

"Look at them lying there—all young men, trusting to my care—to me who had boasted that I was an old soldier. I am disgraced, broken; the very children will laugh at me." Gomez sank down and lowered his forehead to the ground, while his frame shook with grief.

"What the devil has happened?" said the Colonel impatiently.

"I was surprised," said Gomez, raising his face, "and though they killed my poor boys, they would not kill me, no, though I fought hard."

"Who surprised you?"

"Who but the devil himself? And knowing he was near, I should have taken no risk. You saw him. He has watched here, knowing you would come, and he has used me as a messenger to give your Excellency warning."

"Was he alone just now?" said the Colonel sharply.

"He was alone of set purpose, to show his contempt. His warning was that your Excellency must leave the country."

"Did you carry out my orders about Señor Elmore?"

"He is now safe in the valley, and Pedro lives to be

Captain in my place. I am a dog—a beaten mule, only fit to draw burdens.”

“Yes,” said the Colonel dryly, “that is what you are, and that being so, you may find your way back to the valley, while I and the men follow the trail of the Indians.”

“I can follow a trail,” said Gomez, suddenly starting up, “if your Excellency will trust me again.”

“I trust you always, Captain,” said the Colonel gravely; “better soldiers than you have been surprised. Tell the men to rest while we consider what is best to do, for Indians followed us here, and must be now watching our movements. First understand this, Captain, that some of the men are inclined to be mutinous, and let them know plainly that the first man who declines to obey will be shot in the dark, and his spirit left to wander in the darkness for ever. Send the guide to me.”

Gomez saluted, and walked stiffly to the men without another glance at the dead. They thronged round him, all speaking together, with violent gestures, but he declined to tell anything until they had formed up into line, when he artfully gave them another version of the massacre, which did not reflect on his leadership, and concluded by saying that any man who was not eager for vengeance had better fall out. No man stirred.

“Then,” he said, “sit and eat; for there is work yet to be done before we go back to our women, and to the wives and children of our comrades.”

The guide joined the Colonel, and with his body bent went flitting from tree to tree, scanning the ground as he went deep into the forest.

An hour later the march was resumed across the prairie into the forest path that led direct to the river over against the entrance to the valley, leaving Gomez with a few men hidden to watch the prairie for sign of pursuit, under orders not to fire, but to rejoin the main body at once in case Indians followed. He soon rejoined his friends with the news that a score or so of

Indians had entered the prairie, and the Colonel sent out three scouts into the wood with the Chino guide, to verify the conclusions he had made, namely, that the Indians had also made for the river in the direction of an old clearing. Late in the afternoon the Colonel halted on the river, without having been attacked, and having been joined by the scouts, and after giving plenty of time for the Indian spies to come up and watch his movements, he crossed the river with all his men.

Instead, however of entering the valley, he remained inside the natural gorge, under cover of the deep shadows; then, when the stars were out, emerged into the broad stream, and hugging the near shore, went silently down with the current, the three long, low canoes linked together with lariats to prevent scattering. The paddles were muffled, and were used only to keep the bows straight.

It was a great relief to those watching in the boats when the sound of voices broke on the stillness, first in a gentle murmur, and then in a louder volume of sound, out of which distinct words could be heard, showing that the Indians were celebrating their victory, and a still greater relief when a red glare of fires could be seen through the darkness. The paddlers ceased now, allowing the canoes to drift into the required position, and orders were given in whispers. A long pause of complete silence on the part of the attacking party ensued until the canoes had drifted opposite the Indian camp, defined by half a dozen fires, from which a faint reflection reached the river, showing up the motionless body of a sentinel standing on a spit of white sand.

Gomez whispered a word to the Colonel. The latter signified assent, and Gomez stripped himself, rubbed oil over his body, and with his machete in his hand slipped gently into the dark water and disappeared in a moment on a perilous swim, while those in the canoes relieved their position by holding to the branches. A score of fierce eyes were fixed feverishly on the dark figure of the

sentinel, and at each movement of his head they involuntarily tightened their grasp on their rifles. Once the man stooped his body to glance along the river, and once he moved back a few paces as a sudden plunge and snort marked the near presence of an alligator. Then he stood listening to the sound, which told its tale to those in the canoes, the sound of the alligator swimming fast down stream in pursuit of prey—human prey this time, and not fish. They heard the snap of the great jaws with a shuddering fear that Gomez had been seized, and, after another interval of waiting, the Colonel was about to give the order to attack, when the sentinel was seen to turn his head and then walk a few paces, to start again, alert, with his plumed head stretched forward. The Chino scout dipped his blade into the water with a slight splash, and imitated the snort of an alligator. At the sound the sentinel turned his head to look across, and the same instant he was borne to the ground by a figure which rose out of the darkness almost at his feet. Then from the spot there came the ringing croak of a large frog, and, at the sign, the canoes were softly paddled across. Gomez directed their approach by the same signal, and presently fourteen figures were crouching on the ground, ready for the attack.

Apparently the Indians felt so secure that they had only posted one scout, and the sand was soaking up his blood. The others of the band were seated about the fires, their weapons discarded, two or three of them crooning a song, the others talking and eating. Their dreaded leader, Tupac himself, sat among the chiefs, explaining to them his future plans, in a last endeavour to win them to an immediate assault on the valley.

"While those men are there," he said, in his deep tones, "you and your people have no peace. They are robbers—gauchos malos—who will mark down your homes and look with an evil eye on the beauty of your daughters. When your warriors are away on the hunt they will steal upon your defenceless homes, put the

torch to your toldos and carry off your women. And more than that, they will carry away a treasure that would make you rich and powerful. Why, do you think, did they pollute the sacred place of the Sun-god? I will tell you. Because that therein is stored the gold of the Incas. I say to you, and it is my last word, strike hard and strike now for the love of your wives, for peace and security, and for wealth to make yourselves feared."

The murmurs of approval had scarcely died away, when the wall of darkness was rent by the flash of a sudden terrible volley, followed by the rush and fierce cry of the very men described as being an easy prey.

The younger warriors, panic-stricken, fled without stopping to secure their weapons, the older men attempted to rally, but a second volley shook their nerves, and when they saw the gleam of the broad knives, they too fled with wild cries.

Tupac was left alone to meet the enemies who had in one moment falsified his words and scattered his friends. He stood as one stunned, then, with a wild cry of rage and grief, bounded into the darkness, a man whose life now would be in as much danger among his former friends as among his foes.

CHAPTER XXI

HIS ENEMY'S DAUGHTER

THE ex-muleteer, Pedro, faithfully carried out his instructions in regard to James Elmore, who was delivered, sick with fever, into his hands by Captain Gomez but an hour before the Tupac surprised the gauchos, as they breakfasted on the skirt of the prairie. Lieutenant Pedro was glad to turn his back on the gloomy woods, and re-cross the river into the open valley. Pedro loved the "bonitas mosas," the pretty girls. He was the best dancer in the troop, and it was his pride to show his grace in the "panuela," or dance for two. He loved, too, the maté that flowed after the dance; the highly seasoned "catapulcra"—dish of mutton and sweet potatoes; but he had a greater fascination in the valley than any of these things—in the dark and scornful eyes, the proud, pale beauty of his Colonel's daughter, and now that he was lieutenant, he gave wings to his fancy.

After he had placed Elmore in a toldo far removed from the quinta, he changed his shoes for the gaucho's riding-boots, and with his huge silver spurs glinting in the sun, his red sash nicely tied, and his sombrero gracefully slanted over his bold, handsome, dissolute face, he sought out Miss Colston to give her the message. He found her with Jack, seated on a stone near the cyclopean pyramid, on whose summit Mr. Milcent was then at work with rule and compass. He paused for some minutes in astonishment to watch the spare bent figure,

then seeing himself observed, advanced with clinking spurs.

"Why are you here? Do you bring news?" she cried, on seeing him.

"I have been far into the forest, señorita, and I have hastened with a message to you. The Colonel bid me say it was for you alone, and he selected me as the one most to be trusted."

"The message—quick!"

Pedro let his admiring glance rest on her face a moment, but she looked him down with a high glance of disdain.

"It is for the señorita's own ear, and for no one else. Little boy, run down to the lake and pluck that flower for the lady."

Jack ran off obediently.

"The señorita has made a friend of the little one, but it was I, Pedro, who brought him safely here, carrying him under my poncho for the warmth of my body, when he was cold to the bone."

"Tell me what you have to say."

"It is I, Pedro, lieutenant, who has also safely brought the little one's brother here."

"Is he here? Mr. Elmore?"

"He is here," said Pedro, with a fierce look in his smoke-black eyes, as he noticed her excitement, "because I brought him. He has been taken prisoner. He is ill of the fever, and he calls upon the fair English lady. 'Beatreece'."

Pedro mimicked the word Beatrice.

"Does she know he is here?" she asked quickly.

"No; and no one must know he is here but you and I. It is the Colonel's word. He is safely housed in a toldo, hidden from the quinta, and it is his Excellency's wish that the señorita should attend him."

Marion clasped her hands.

"The señorita need not trouble herself much with this

man who is ill and yellow, and who calls on his Beatrice. I can myself look to him, having some skill with——”

“I will go to him now,” she said. “Lead the way.”

“No; else they would wonder there at the quinta why you should follow me. I will be at noon, when they enjoy the siesta, at the first field, and will there wait for you.”

“Very well,” she said.

“Tell me of your kindness, señorita, why the señor takes his stand above on the rock of the Incas. I have heard that of old the priests of our race—yours and mine—stood there three times each day.”

“Our race!” she said, looking at him with flashing eyes. “What insolence is this?”

Pedro showed his strong, white teeth in a grin.

“Surely,” he said, “the señorita is not ignorant that she is of the blood of the great. Beauty such as hers is not the beauty of the white. When these old walls rung to the laugh of girls, such beauty as yours lived here in the princesses of your mother’s race, in the daughters of my father’s people.”

“Dare you speak to me like this? The Colonel shall know of it and have you whipped.”

“His Excellency knows. Have me whipped! But you cannot whip out of me the fact I treasure above all—that you and I are of the same race.”

“Go!” she said. “Go!”

Pedro bowed, with a graceful sweep of his broad sombrero. “Do not forget,” he said, “to be silent concerning the prisoner.” He craned his neck to have another look at Mr. Milcent, then walked away whistling.

Marion’s face was distorted with passion. “My God!” she murmured, “can it be true? Is there then some cause for the strange sympathy I have for these ruins, some taint in my blood that brings me to this level of that wretch?”

“What do you see,” said Jack, “that makes you afraid?”

“Oh, Jack,” she cried, catching him by the wrist, “look

into my eyes. Are they different to other ladies' eyes? Are they clear?"

Jack looked solemnly now into one large dark eye, eloquent with anguish, then into the fellow. "I see a tiny little boy," he said, "with a red shirt; and the red is like fire, and back of it is the lake."

"But are they clear? Is the white stained? Is my hair coarse like an Indian's?" and she laughed a little hysterically.

Jack rubbed his little hooked nose against her cheek, and smiled, then stood off to look again.

"Your eyes are like the lake," he said, "with the moon at the bottom, and your cheeks are soft as soft, and your hair shines like the wings of el carpentero, the wood-pecker you told me about."

"Is it very black?" she said, putting her hand to her hair. "Black, how I hate it. But hark, Jack, there is good news for you; and soon you may show your brother all the treasures you have shown to me—the old ruins, and the parrot, and the flowers."

"Are you glad?" said the boy solemnly.

"Why, of course I am."

"I know when peoples is glad. They laugh—but there is no laugh in your eyes. They look like the Indian woman down by the garden, and she sits and looks at things far, that no one can see."

"Am I like that Indian woman, Jack?" she whispered, with a smile that mocked the pain at her heart.

"I dunno. You are quiet, same as the Indian woman, but you don't smoke like she. When you are not by me I know you are here, for you like the old stones, and the old parrot, and you can look at the water and listen to the wind, and watch the birds, without talking; you belong to this place, but with the other girls, they get tired of the stillness and they laugh—and they are frightened always."

"Yes," she murmured, "I am a part of these ruins, and the shadow that has fallen on them has fallen on me."

The little chap suddenly paused to laugh.

"Won't brother be s'prised when I show him how I can shoot? My! We will go down to the water and shoot the big thing that never sleeps. See! It keeps me awake, cos I see it in the dark, and its eyes are open wide always."

"You will forget me when brother comes!"

"You will come with us," he said, "and carry the basket with the food."

"Like the Indian woman. When you are a big man, little Jack, always be kind to women, for they are weak."

"I will carry the basket, and you can carry the gun."

She kissed him, and went into the quinta to prepare delicacies for the sick man, while Jack threw himself into the shade of a bush, with a tired sign, and entered into a conversation with a humming-bird, who quivered like a gem within a few inches of his face.

Marion at noon slipped out of the house and went unobserved down to the first field where Pedro, waiting beneath a palm, watched her coming with an insolent stare of open admiration.

"Your basket, señorita. It is too heavy for such a small hand."

"Lead the way," she said quietly.

Pedro swaggered on, twirling his oiled moustaches, but he had drunk of the maté fired with spirit, and he felt in the humour to be bold.

"Follow me always, señorita, and your path will be strewn with flowers," he said, leering over his shoulder. "It amazes me when I see you that Señor Ferdinand has no eyes but for that other."

She made no answer, and her face expressed neither fear nor anger. Pedro strutted on, then, emboldened to further advances, slackened his pace and stopped.

"Go on," she said quietly, suddenly levelling a small revolver.

He laughed, and laughing went on his way.

"When you look like your father a wise man knows what to do," he mumbled; "but in the end, oh, yes, in the end it is the mother's blood that comes into the lips."

She shuddered a little at the coarse allusion, and her face was very white when she entered the lonely toldo. Pedro opened the narrow door to let her in, and she gathered her skirts, so they should not brush him, with an air of loathing.

"Outside!" she said, in a whisper; and the man lurched out, with an ugly scowl on his vicious face.

She went softly to the rough couch, and her lips quivered when she looked at the gaunt face of the sick man, she put her hand to her heart for a few minutes, then felt his brow with a cool hand, re-arranged his pillow, and had given him a draught of quinine and was feeding him with jelly before he realised that some one was in the room different to those who had recently waited on him. He followed her graceful form with his hollow eyes, as she moved silently about the room, throwing out a bunch of flowers which Pedro had placed in a vessel, probably as a compliment to her, and next sprinkling the hard earth floor with water, before using a broom. She was dressed in soft black muslin spotted with red, with a black lace mantilla over her head, and her white arms and white face were almost ghost-like in contrast. If she felt any surprise that they should meet under such strange circumstances, or any more tender emotion, she did not now show it in her face, for she had the divine self-constraint of the nurse.

He sighed and moved. She was at his side in a moment.

"Who are you?" he whispered, looking up at her with a pucker between his eyes. "Why do you look so troubled? What message have you that your face should be so white, and in your eyes all the mystery and sorrow of the night?"

"I am your nurse," she said gently, "and you must be quiet."

"Quiet! It is quietness that is killing me—the horrible silence of the forest, and the mountains. Where is Tupac?" He raised himself on his elbow and looked long round the room with a fixed stare in his blue eyes.

She pressed him softly back on his pillow with a firm hand, but her heart trembled at the name which seemed to link her with forgotten memories.

"Where is Tupac?" he muttered again; "and the Colonel—Colonel Colston? I saw his cruel face. Where is he, I say? I accuse him before God—robber and assassin. But they must not meet, no, father and son, enemies, horrible!"

"You are using up your strength," she said firmly, "and you need it."

"Need it, yes," he said, with a wild look; "I must get strong to punish him. That is all I wish to live for."

"And your brother?" she murmured, soothing him with her hand on his forehead, "you have not forgotten little Jack? Get strong for his sake."

"My little Jack!" he murmured, with a smile, and lay still, looking up at the ceiling, through which sifted a ray of sunshine. Under the gentle movement of her hand he sank into sleep, and when his breathing came regularly, she sank to the ground, with her hands in her lap, and a look of horror in her eyes.

"'Father and son,' what did it mean? And Tupac—who was he?"

Presently she rose, and seated herself where she could watch him, sitting with her chin in her hand, brooding over the black shadows that were closing around her, but ready to minister to the patient at the slightest movement. The door creaked, and Pedro's scowling face appeared. She put her finger to her lips to exact silence, but he growled surlily that she had been long enough, and her absence would be noticed. She moved to the door and bid him return later, with Mrs. Milcent.

"Your father said no one was to know but you of this man's presence until he returned."

"Do as I bid you!" she ordered, and he lurched away muttering. He went as far as the toldos, and there sat down in the shade with his back to the wall and dropped off to sleep. There were very few in the valley who were not asleep at that hour, except perhaps two people. Mr. Milcent, who appeared to be equally indifferent to either cold or heat, was still actively at work on the lofty summit of the pyramid, checking the shadow from the gnomon in its course over the smooth sun circle, and Marion sat and watched by the sick man's side.

Miss Dunell, late in the afternoon, was swinging in a hammock, looking up at the distant peak of gleaming snow, which held out such a wonderful but illusive promise of delicious cold. A striking picture she made, in a cloudy dress of white that overflowed the side of the hammock, one arm supporting her head, the other trailing down, and Marion, stepping out on to the balcony, stood for some moments looking.

"Miss Dunell!"

"Oh, is that you? How sombre you look, and tragic." She swung gracefully to a sitting position and balanced herself by grasping the ropes. "Do you know, Miss Colston, that you seem to me to be somehow kin to the wild and savage beauty of this lonely place?"

"Am I to regard that as a compliment?"

"My dear child, don't, for heaven's sake. You positively make me shudder when you speak in that tone, as if you had neither youth nor hope, and life were one long note of despair. Where have you been all the day?"

"Nursing."

"Ah, I might have known that. You are exactly the girl I should expect to offer up your life as a sacrifice for the crime of having been born beautiful. Who is the fortunate patient?"

"Mr. James Elmore. He is ill with fever, and I have been attending him all day."

"Fever! I hope it is not catching."

"There is no fear of infection," said Marion, with a curl of her lip.

"Are you quite sure? One cannot be too careful. And I am sure to catch anything that is running about. He has not been brought into the house, I presume?"

"Perhaps you did not hear the name. It is Mr. Elmore who lies ill, and I thought that you would like to nurse him."

Miss Dunell fell back gracefully into the hammock. "I am curious to know why you should have thought that."

"Mr. Elmore is an old friend of yours."

"Really," she laughed, "if friendship made a claim upon one's services as a nurse, I should be compelled in self-defence to have a very limited circle of acquaintances. I am surprised to know he is here, and very sorry to hear of his illness; but I would not dream of depriving you of the pleasure of nursing him. Now sit down and talk to me of these wonderful ruins."

"I will send Mr. Ferdinand up," said Marion bitterly; "he is, perhaps, a better savage than I am."

"Yes, do," said Miss Dunell sweetly, "if you are sure you can spare him."

CHAPTER XXII

A TERRIBLE NIGHT

MARION ran downstairs, with a little colour in her cheeks, and a strange sense of elation, and after giving Ferdinand a peremptory order to go up and entertain Miss Dunell, she sought and found Mrs. Milcent.

"I want your help," she said with decision.

"That is very flattering to me," said the little lady, looking up from some botanical specimens she was neatly arranging. "You have not given me the chance to speak to you for two days, and now you come in with marching orders. In what can your slave help you?"

"I wish you to help me nurse a man ill with fever."

"I am with you, my dear. Let me put these treasures away, so. Now, then, what of the commissariat and the drugs? Thank heaven, quinine grows at the door, old nurse Nature having providentially supplied an antidote to her own ills. Is it a night job? It is. Then I will scribble a note to my husband—though he is so taken up with his hobby that he will not miss me. Put a few things into a basket, and don't forget that my appetite is large and healthy."

The note was scribbled off, the little lady drew on her gloves, caught up a stick which she carried in her walks to make short work of snakes, and was ready for anything when Marion returned from the pantry.

"What a magnificent Queen of the Night you would make," said she, "with that pale beauty, and haunting spirit of romance and mystery."

"Do I look strange?" said Marion, glancing at her dress.

"Strange only as rare things are strange. Gracious heavens, what a costume for a nurse! Cover your dress in an earthly apron, otherwise I shall be staring at you in the long watches."

They found their way unobserved to the hut, where Lieutenant Pedro, having but slightly recovered from his debauch, was on guard in a very bad temper. Mrs. Milcent favoured him with a cool stare, then went to the couch.

"Why," she said, "he is a white man."

"Yes," said Marion, "it is Mr. Elmore."

"Mr. Elmore! Why, in the name of humanity, is he left here in this wretched hovel, when there are spare rooms in the quinta?"

"It was by his Excellency's orders," growled Pedro, "and his orders, moreover, were that no one was to know of his coming except myself and the señorita. It is in my mind that you must not remain."

"And who are you, my good man?"

"I am Lieutenant Pedro."

"Then, Lieutenant Pedro, be good enough to leave us."

"I am here by his Excellency's orders," said Pedro, seating himself, "and here I stay."

"I have often wished that I were a man, but never so much as now," said the little lady, with a frown. "Marion, my dear, go back to the house for Mr. Ferdinand. I will remain here."

Pedro lowered his brows and began to twist a cigarette. "If you speak so much it will wake him," he said, with a nod at Elmore; "and if you annoy me further, I will turn you out."

"Pedro," said Marion, forcing herself to speak calmly, "it is not necessary to guard a sick man, but it is necessary to nurse him. You can leave him to us."

"It is not safe to disobey his Excellency," said Pedro,

with a meaning look, "no more for his daughter than it was for his wife—and still less for me. Yet if the señorita will forget some of the things which have happened to-day, I may forget until to-morrow morning what my orders were."

"I have already forgotten," said she haughtily. "I shall say nothing to my father about you."

"Then I have the pleasure to wish you, señorita, and you, señora, good-night. There is a tarantula in the roof—I saw the glitter of his eyes just now—and a jararaca was seen sunning himself beside the wall. Still, what does it matter? But keep the door closed lest the vampire bat should enter. Buenos nostos!"

Mrs. Milcent could not suppress a shudder as the man went out, and shook out her skirts with a nervous action, while Marion took the lamp and searched the corners and skirting of the hut.

"Probably," she muttered, "he said that to frighten us."

"The brute!" said Mrs. Milcent with decision. "But, after all, those creatures do not bite unless they are in danger, and for my part, if a spider or a snake appears, I will endeavour to convince it that my intentions are strictly friendly. Ugh! If it were not so late I would have the poor man taken to the quinta; but, as it is, we must make the most of this situation."

She bent over the patient, took his temperature, felt his pulse, declared that the fever was slight, and ventured the opinion that exposure and worry were at the bottom of his collapse.

"Remove the worry, give him plenty of good broth, and he will be on his legs in a week. That is my opinion, my child."

"Are you sure?" she whispered, with a sigh, as she seated herself by the couch to watch the wan face.

Mrs. Milcent, with occasional sharp glances at the floor and walls, busied herself with the contents of the basket, and when she had finished she sat down after a

careful examination of the chair, and studied her companion's face.

"So," she murmured, after a long silence, "that is Mr. Elmore. Of course, I am dying to know where he came from; how he got here; why he should be left in this hovel in charge of a dissolute brigand. It occurs to me also that Beatrice should be in either my place or in yours."

"I did tell Miss Dunell of his presence here," said Marion, with a rush of colour, "but she, well——"

"She very naturally preferred to remain at the quinta."

"To talk with Mr. Ferdinand."

"She was always a sensible girl, and I often think that sentimental folk, busybodies like you and I, succeed in muddling their own lives while mismanaging and muddling with other people's affairs. When you consider, my dear, that there is a ferocious spider up in the roof, and a venomous serpent beneath the floor, I think that you will admit the wisdom is on the side of Beatrice, who at the present moment is swinging in delicious security on the balcony, listening to soft music."

Presently they settled themselves for the night's long vigil—and there fell upon them the consciousness of a brooding silence that seemed at once full of danger. And the shadows of the hut appeared to creep out upon them like stealthy foes to the edge of the light. Marion's face was bent forward, her chin nestling in her hand—and Mrs. Milcent looked at her for comfort, but instead of comfort, she felt a growing sense of uneasiness. There was something unfamiliar in Marion's face, a look she had never seen on the face of any woman she had yet met—something brooding and mysterious as though she had an existence apart—and in the shadow all that was English was lost and in its place came out the unknown melancholy type, with its set lips that appeared strangers to a smile, the curved nose with the thin delicate nostrils, and the large, dark, gleaming eyes. Who was this girl with the quiet ways,

the soft melodious voice, a face that sometimes quivered to each phase of feeling like the surface of a lake stirred by every wind, and at others was so fixed? And what, she asked, was she doing there with that young Englishman?

Mrs. Milcent was not above the prejudices of the ordinary woman for the unconventional, and she had no sympathy with the licence claimed by the revolting daughters—though Miss Dunell had taught her the futility of being too exacting, and she felt just a little bit severe for a few minutes as she studied the motionless figure. Her lips were pressed together very tightly under the spasm of offended virtue when Marion turned to look at her, attracted by the close inspection, and in a glance she recognised the look of displeasure.

"Ah," she murmured, "I had hopes that you who are so brave and good would like me."

"My dear," said Mrs. Milcent, while the colour rested on her cheeks, "I have said nothing—what a strange remark!"

"That is it," Marion answered with a faint smile. "I am strange, I have no right here."

"It is a woman's rightful place," said Mrs. Milcent gently.

"I do not mean here in this hut—though whether right or not is indifferent to me. I mean—ah, well—you will think me merely morbid. Yet I had wished that I had not seen that look on your face."

"Pardon! I am only a British matron with all her faults and narrowness."

"Ah, no—you are not. You are a woman—a good woman, who does not think meanly of the lowest."

Mrs. Milcent went softly over and stroked the shining coils, then, stooping, kissed the calm, smooth brow.

Marion stretched up her hands and drew down the little face to her own.

"You must try and like me," she murmured. "I never knew my mother, and my heart has yearned for her—in

these days more than ever. She was not white—my mother.”

“That is it?” exclaimed Mrs. Milcent.

“Yes,” said Marion slowly, while her hands dropped. “That is it. All—all that she held dear—her people, even their homes perished—and her daughter has no place here. But see, I have the patience of her tribe. Do not think I am complaining. I can wait—and do what is mine to do.”

Her face was calm again—and in her eyes was a look of sullen patience.

“Ah, my child, forgive me. But, look! look!”

There upon the wall, above the sick man’s head, and crawling slowly down, was a huge, hideous, black, and hairy spider, whose eyes shone indeed like diamond points, and whose great fangs moved perpetually, as if in anticipation he were burying them in some juicy morsel. When about two feet from the couch it sprang to the coverlet, and with its two front legs raised in an arch remained perfectly still, except for a slight undulation from the breathing of the sleeping man. Its outspread legs covered the space of several inches in diameter, and its pin-point eyes glittered out of its black and venomous-looking head, above the curved fangs.

“Be still,” said Marion in a whisper, as she grasped her companion tightly by the wrist. “I have heard it is an omen—the emblem of those who lived and are dead.”

“But it might bite him,” said Mrs. Milcent, trying to twist her free hand. “This is horrible, my dear Miss Colston. Let me free.”

“Be quiet,” said Marion harshly, and the imperious little woman winced at the tone, but, instead of making an angry retort, looked with wonder at the white face at her side. Marion’s black eyes were fixed on the repulsive insect, not in horror or fear, but with a look of expectation.

“My God!” The exclamation, in low tones, came

from the couch. Elmore had wakened conscious, and his glance had fallen on the two ladies standing like statues, whose faces shone pale in the dim light. Following their fixed gaze, he saw the shaggy, sprawling creature within a foot of his face.

"Don't move," said Marion, not withdrawing her eyes from the glittering points. "Keep absolutely still."

For several seconds they remained in this position. Then Marion raised her disengaged hand until it was held out straight, the soft muslin falling back, and leaving the white forearm with the outstretched hand. She stood like a priestess evoking some dark spirit. The spider suddenly shook its body with a rapid motion and moved higher up where the heaving of the clothes seemed to enrage it.

"Be still," muttered Marion, "for heaven's sake!" and the fingers tightened like steel on the soft wrist, till Mrs. Milcent bit her lips from pain.

Then the repulsive creature leapt into the air, and alighted on the outstretched hand, where it stood again, still with its two legs raised. Mrs. Milcent shrank back.

"Don't!" muttered Marion, whose face was deadly white under the strain, and Mrs. Milcent, though frozen with horror, remained quiet. Elmore raised himself on his elbow, and so remained, fearing to make another movement lest the spider, in its alarm, should bury its fangs in the firm hand.

Then the hairy legs moved slowly forward, it stopped, jerked its body again violently, plunged its fangs into the white arm, and was gone in a spring that seemed to carry it to the door.

"Thank God!" said Marion, with an hysterical cry, "it is I who am doomed, and not he."

Mrs. Milcent tore her wrist away, threw one arm round the shrinking girl's waist, and put her lips to the wound, sucking the venom. She placed the lamp near the bed, thrust a hunting-knife into Elmore's hand and bade him heat the point. Then she squeezed the angry

wound where the fangs had gone deeply in, washed it, and taking the red-hot knife, cauterised the flesh.

"For God's sake," cried Elmore wildly, "don't torture her."

"Lie down!" said Mrs. Milcent, thrusting him back on the pillow without ceremony. Then she turned to Marion, who had fainted, brought her to, forced her to drink a glass of wine, and bound up the poor, blistered arm. Then in the most business-like way she gave Elmore some jelly, took the lamp in one hand and stick in the other, and searched the floor and walls for the spider. Not finding it, she suddenly dropped the stick, flung her arms round Marion's neck, and indulged for one brief spell in a passionate storm of tears, accompanied by murmurs of endearment and admiration.

"What is it—who are you?" said Elmore feebly, raising himself on his elbow, "is this some hideous nightmare?"

"Hideous!" Mrs. Milcent moved her head away, first to dry her eyes, then she turned them scornfully on Elmore. "Hideous! Do you realise what this brave child has done for you? Is there any one but Marion would have lured that terrible monster from you to her own person? Would Beatrice have done it?"

"The light shines in my eyes," murmured the sick man, "I cannot see."

Mrs. Milcent supported Marion to her feet and began walking her up and down the narrow floor. "You are growing drowsy. You must not, you shall not sleep. Oh, if there were only some one here to help! And I thought I had drawn the poison."

"Oh, my head is bursting! For heaven's sake tell me what has happened, why you are here?"

Mrs. Milcent looked helplessly from one to the other, and then she breathed a sigh of satisfaction, for the colour was coming into Marion's face, and the fixed look of stupor in her eyes was in a flash replaced by another look. She led the girl gently to the couch.

"Thank her," she said quietly; "she has saved you from torture, perhaps from death."

Elmore reached out for her hand, and peered into her face, but there was no recognition in his glance.

"He does not know," Marion whispered with a sob.

"Don't trouble, my dear," said Mrs. Milcent, with a sigh after one swift look into the girl's face. "Has the drowsy feeling passed off?"

"I feel only a throbbing in the arm, but I think that is from the burn."

"A throbbing! My poor child, you must be suffering dreadfully. How long would it take me to run to the toldos?"

"You must not do that. Pedro is a dangerous man."

"To the quinta, then? I wonder those people there have not had the sense to search for us. Can they imagine that we have gone for an evening stroll? It must be midnight."

Marion touched her lips and pointed to Elmore, whose eyes were closed. In a few minutes, while they stood patiently by, his regular breathing showed that he was again asleep, his exhaustion overcoming him.

Then Marion closed her eyes and staggered into a chair, uttering a low moan of anguish.

As Mrs. Milcent stood in despair she heard soft steps approaching, and saw the door swing softly open. She seized the lamp and held it above her head, throwing the light upon a man's face that looked extraordinarily wild with its matting of long black hair, glistening with wet.

His eyes, bold and piercing, remained fixed on the little white face, with its determined mouth. Then his glance went by to the drooping figure on the chair, and to the dimly outlined couch.

"This is a house of sickness," said the lady, in a whisper.

He stepped in, and a little stream of water draining from his fringed leather trousers, ran along the floor. In one hand he held a crooked machete, in the other a

rifle and a bandolier of cartridges, both of them, she noticed, dry. She drew back with a low, involuntary cry at his menacing appearance.

"An Indian!" Then she placed herself before Marion, with a desperate resolve to defend her.

"Fear not," said the man, in deep tones, "I will not harm you."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CHIEF AGAIN

"WHY are you here alone? Are there no men in the place?" and his glance sought every corner of the room.

"A score of men, within hearing, and armed," she answered quickly.

A slight smile flickered for a moment about the man's thin lips. "Why, then, have they left you alone, for I see you are in need of help? I listened at the wall without before I entered. Tell me what I can do?"

He placed his knife in his belt, his rifle against the wall, and waited gravely for her orders. "Tell me what I can do," he said authoritatively.

"You can go up to the house, rouse the men there, and tell them to hasten here with a hammock and bearers."

He stepped to Marion's side and looked long at the dark and beautiful face—so long that Mrs. Milcent grew impatient and touched his arm.

"There is no time to lose, if you wish to help me. Please go at once."

He scarcely seemed able to draw away his gaze, and when he did a deep sigh escaped him. Then, without heeding Mrs. Milcent, he moved to the couch and bent his head over Elmore.

"Wonderful!" he muttered; "most wonderful!"

"What are you muttering?" said the little lady, with a stamp of her foot. "I have told you twice how you can help."

"Lady, I, too, am in need of help—a fugitive, with the price of blood on my head. If I go to the house and am recognised, they will take my life. This man here is my brother. If you go yourself, and I see you have the courage to go, you may leave these two safely in my charge. But I will ask you to say no word of my presence here. When I hear you coming with the bearers I will disappear."

"But——" she began, and looked at Marion.

"For my mother's sake," he said, "every woman is sacred to me."

She flushed a little, but without another word went to the door. A moment she stood appalled by the darkness, then she felt for the path with her feet, and ran.

When she returned, within the hour, with her husband, Ferdinand, and several grumbling men, not, however, including Pedro, she found Marion awake, with a startled look in her face.

"Oh, those eyes!" she cried.

"What eyes?" said Ferdinand, who wore a particularly unpleasant expression at being dragged out.

"See to Mr. Elmore," said Mrs. Milcent sharply to him. "Now, my dear girl, we will soon have you in your own room."

Marion, however, still looked wildly around. "When I awoke just now," she said, with feverish rapidity, "I saw just over there in the dark a pair of eyes—sad, accusing eyes, that seemed to burn into me."

"It was a dream, my dear," said Mrs. Milcent soothingly. "You have been alone. I left you asleep, and rushed off for help. Here is the hammock. Lift her gently. There, now, I will walk beside you and hold your hand. Ugh! How glad I am to leave this horrid place."

They had reached the quinta, and the noise of the bearers brought Miss Dunell to the door in a loose gown, with her hair rippling over her shoulders.

"I think it very strange that you should have left me

alone," she said irritably. "I have had a most restless night."

"You look very charming, Beatrice," said Mrs. Milcent, whose face bore traces of the struggle she had been through. "Pray do not spoil the effect of your appearance by speech."

"Good gracious, aunt, how tired and washed-out you look! Mr. Ferdinand," she went on in her metallic accents, "pray roll me a cigarette. It may soothe my nerves."

Mrs. Milcent sighed and looked keenly at Ferdinand's smiling face.

"I am afraid your niece has been greatly worried," he said, catching the glance. "She is, I think, very sensitive and suffering has the same effect upon her that it has on me."

"You are both 'too good for human nature's daily food,'" she said dryly.

"At any rate I am a victim to one very human weakness, curiosity. Both your husband and myself are very anxious to know the cause of Miss Colston's sudden illness and of Mr. Elmore's strange appearance."

"I cannot gratify your curiosity now," she said; "I must attend to my patients; but I may perhaps assure you that there is no danger of infection."

"I think, my dear," said her husband with a troubled look, "you had better let me attend to them. You are worn out, I can see you are; and I think you might have told me before that you required help."

She put her hands on his shoulder and kissed him on the forehead. "You have other things to think about, and you must confess that I am a better nurse than you. Good-night."

"Have you noticed," said Ferdinand, with a sneer, "that when a woman has any nursing to attend to, she invariably assumes an air of mingled mystery and condescension?"

Mr. Milcent polished his glasses, then looked gravely

through them at Ferdinand. "I have," he said, "noticed that when there is any illness in a house it is a woman who knows what to do, and how to do it. Good-night."

The Colonel, with his men, arrived early the next morning, and his first inquiry was concerning Elmore.

"He has gone, señor," said Pedro, who was the person questioned.

"Gone! Escaped?"

"No, your Excellency. I took the señorita to him yesterday, and this morning they were both gone."

"You knew what your orders were. Captain Gomez, place this man under arrest." And giving Pedro a glance that made him writhe, he rode on to the quinta, where Miss Dunell and Mr. Ferdinand received him with congratulations.

"Where is Marion?" he asked shortly.

"She is here, ill. I assure you, Colonel, we had last night a sensation, involving quite a mystery and a romance. Mrs. Milcent aroused us after midnight with a terrible tale that Marion was ill in a hut, with whom, of all persons, should you think?"

"Oh, it was Mrs. Milcent, was it?" said the Colonel.

"Who is using my name?" said that lady, appearing at the door, looking, after her night of trial and watching, very white and tired.

"What right," said the Colonel coldly, "had you to interfere with Mr. Elmore?"

"What right?" she said, astonished. "The right of humanity, Colonel Colston. But do I gather that you question my right—or the right of any one, for that matter—to attend to a sick man?"

"I allow of no one to interfere with my plans, madam."

"Really! And do your plans embrace the murder of a helpless man?"

"My God, if you were a man!"

"But I am not, thank Heaven! It seems to me that you have returned in a very savage temper. I presume you have been defeated, and are recovering your self-respect by browbeating a woman."

"Upon my word, I admire your pluck," he said, with a smile. "No, I was not defeated. On the contrary, I routed the enemy, and have exploded once for all the reputation of El Demonio."

"I knew you would succeed," said Miss Dunell, with shining eyes.

He glanced at her, and bowed. Then he turned again to Mrs. Milcent. "You look very tired."

"I have been attending your daughter and Mr. Elmore," she said quietly.

"And how did you learn of Mr. Elmore's presence?"

"From your daughter, who, I may tell you, has behaved like a heroine."

"So!" he said. "I do not recognise her in that character. Now, I would be obliged if some of you would send me in some breakfast, for I am rather played out."

"Won't you see your daughter?" said Mrs. Milcent, looking hard at him.

"Presently," he said, then flung himself into a chair and closed his eyes. It was true he was played out, for he had put his powers to a test which would have killed many younger men, and Mr. Ferdinand watched the lines of weariness on the hard face with secret joy.

"So," said Ferdinand, "you have really broken the legend of invincibility attached to El Demonio?"

"Yes," said the Colonel grimly. "But it was a tough job, and I imagine that if the fellow had had his own way we would have done well to escape with our lives."

"What sort of a man is this leader?" asked Mrs. Milcent; "is he an Indian?"

"I should say he was a young man," said the Colonel, "middle-sized, with broad shoulders, and black hair. He is dark, of course, but he did not strike me as being an Indian of the forest."

"Does he speak English?" she asked.

"Really," he said, with a dark look, "I cannot say, but if he does, I do not think you will have an opportunity

of talking to him. Unfortunately, he escaped, and is no doubt in the depths of the Montana."

Mrs. Milcent shut her lips very tight, to hide a smile.

He settled himself down in an easy chair on the verandah, with his heels on the rails, to relate the whole incidents of the brief campaign.

In the middle of his story Captain Gomez approached.

"Well, Gomez?"

"Pardon, señor, but is Lieutenant Pedro to be treated as a prisoner, or as an officer under guard?"

"You will, this afternoon, in the presence of the men, administer to him twenty-five lashes for disobedience."

"Yes, Excellency," said Gomez slowly, "but——"

"Well!"

"The men wish to rejoice, your honour, after the victory, and they would like it well if your Excellency would pardon Pedro."

"Did they tell you to say that to me?"

"For the love of heaven, no, Señor."

"Well, then, see that my orders are carried out."

Gomez saluted, and walked off heavily, while the Colonel went on with his narrative as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

CHAPTER XXIV

GOMEZ!

LITTLE Jack, having been overlooked, had gone off early in the morning towards the ruins, carrying with him a part of his breakfast, to feed the parrot and a multitude of friends among the ants. Within the largest hall a tribe of umbrella ants, or leaf-cutters, had excavated their nest, and Jack had spent hours in watching the hurrying columns on their way to the trees and the returning procession, each with its cut circle of leaf tilted over its head, the whole proceeding along beaten tracks and marshalled by huge policemen of the tribe. Here, after taking the ancient bird from his lair, Jack went to drop corns of maize in the path of the ants, and to laugh over the scramble for these dainties by the common herd, and at the frantic excitement of the armed warriors. Then he went down full length on his stomach on a small stone, and with his chin in his hands, watched and dreamed over that busy stream of life, while the old old bird, with the wisdom of the ages in its brooding eyes, sat with its bald head on one side, as it peered into the little brown face.

So they were when a man appeared at the door, and so they continued when he, after a rapid glance behind, slowly approached, until his shadow was thrown upon them, and the parrot chuckled.

Jack turned his head to look, then sat up without a word, while the parrot, twisting its head from side to side, slowly waddled to the man and slowly and painfully

climbed up his leg over his body to his shoulder, when it fondled the brown cheek with its huge beak.

"That's funny," said Jack. Then he stared, with a flush in his cheeks; for the man had very stern eyes, and the corners of his thin lips drooped a little. "Your nose," he added gravely, "is just like the parrot's. Is that why he knows you?"

"I know you too," said the man, in a voice so harsh and deep that Jack started; "your name is Jack."

Jack ventured a smile, but the man's brown face was like a mask, fixed in an expression stern and forbidding, and he made no response. The boy rose, stood with his hands clasped behind him, and grew red under the steady regard of those fierce and watchful eyes.

"That's my parrot," he said, with a faint tremble of his chin.

"Tupac! Huala!" croaked the ancient bird.

The man sprang as if he had been shot, and then stood with heaving breast glaring at the bird, which had fallen to the ground, and crouched with its bright eyes fixed on him.

Jack laughed.

"Why," he said, "she is frightened too when he cried 'Tupac!'"

The man sat down, passed his hand over his eyes, then held out his hand to the bird and spoke to it in strange words in a low voice.

"Tupac!" croaked the bird. "Huala! Huala!"

Jack clapped his hands.

"He is talking like the officer Colonel. You know, the man who's gone away to shoot the Indians."

Then the parrot altered its voice and spoke like an old man with quavering notes, and Jack laughed loud at the shaky voice.

"Peace!" said the man, in choking tones. "Peace, troubled spirit. Tell me, little boy, where did this—this thing come from?"

"I saw it on the ground, digging with its beak. And

it's mine; 'cos I have given it food; and no one knows it's here but her and me."

The man looked fixedly at the bird. "Strange," he said, "that my only welcome on returning to the home of my people should be from such a thing as this—and yet, there may be more sympathy between it and me than between me and any other. Boy, are you afraid of me?"

Jack regarded him intently.

"It ain't afraid, are it?" he said, pointing at the parrot. "Well, I ain't. But it's mine—I say—see—I want it."

"Can't I play with it a little while? Since I was a little child like you, Jack, I have had no playfellows—all things were afraid of me. Will you sit by me?"

Jack sat gravely down, resting one hand on the young man's knee, and presently he leant his head against that support.

"When I was a little boy like you, I, too, had a parrot to play with. We played together even here among these old walls."

"And were there any ants then carrying umbrellas?"

"Just the same. Often I, too, watched them, in the sun, as they came and went, working always and going far to find fresh food. I was a little boy like you, and now I am a man—and the parrot is here and knows me, and in between I have been far—far, Jack—cold and wet and hungry—sleeping out under the sky—but always alone—and always watching lest some one should catch me unready. And I am watching still, little boy, and hunting."

"When I am big, I will hunt, too, and sleep out, and be alone."

"Look at the ants, Jack. See how they keep together, and work together. They know best—for it is not well to be alone. It is better not to be a hunter. The ant-lion is a hunter. He is sly and fierce and lives in a pit by himself. The snake is a hunter, too, and he is cunning and silent. All hunters creep and crawl and

seek the dark shadows. Go where there are people, little boy, and learn to laugh and to talk. It is not well to be silent."

"You talk, don't you?"

"Don't you wish me to talk?" said the man, almost humbly.

"Oh, yes, and when you have done I will talk, too. You've got eyes like the big man—see, and when he looks people grow still, and when he says they must do something, they just go and do it. He's bigger'n you."

"Is he good to you?"

"Ah, well, he killed the red snake when it would bite me, and he let me talk to the soldiers, and he said he would find my brother. My brother is lost."

"He is my brother, too, Jack. And he is here up at the house. Are you going?"

Jack had started up with a red face.

"But I will come back again—oh, yes. You come too, see, don't be frightened, you come too;" and he caught hold of the other's fingers to pull him up.

"Huala! Huala!" croaked the parrot.

"I know—oh, my mother! I will not forget, nor forgive."

"Why do you look like that?" whispered Jack, going a little white.

"Did I frighten you, little one? I was but thinking aloud, and did not mean you to hear. Shall I carry you on my shoulder to where I left the things I played with when I was like you—some old, old toys and birds?"

"But I must go to my brother," said Jack.

"Well, good-bye."

"I will come back, oh, yes. What kind of birds are they?"

The man sat silent, with a brooding look and knit brows.

With a sigh Jack climbed on to his shoulder. "Come up," he said, "I don't think there is any toys at all, see."

Tupac rose up and stalked off, and the three of them

made the oddest group—the parrot perched on one shoulder with its head twisted on one side, Jack with a flushed face, and Tupac with an anxious expression. A few minutes later he had moved a loose stone and was exposing with a still more anxious air a curious collection of toys in stone and metal to Jack's critical inspection. Jack was pleased—he forgot even his brother—and very soon the silent walls rang to the sound of childish glee and to sudden deep bursts of laughter which came as a surprise each time to the man who laughed. They played on a smooth rock, with uncouth stone animals, polished to the hue of ebony by the friction of many generations of childish hands.

"See!" exclaimed the boy suddenly, "the lady is looking at us."

"Where—I see no lady."

"See—up there!" and he pointed to the snow pinnacle above the clouds.

"Why do you call that a lady?"

"I dunno—only I seen her there a many times—sitting and looking—and I think some day I will go up to her. You ain't laughing?"

"No, sonny, I'm not laughing. When I was a little chap I also saw her."

"Were you a little boy?"

"Of course."

"All by your lone—like me?"

"Often alone, then, Jack, and afterwards always—alone on the mountains, in the woods, on the plains. Yes, I forgot that I was a boy, and I did not play."

"My!" The little boy studied the dark, square, eagle-nosed face with reflective eyes. "Did you cry even when you was alone?"

"Sometimes."

"So. 'Cos you was sorry for yourself?"

"Because I was sorry for the lady."

"Well, I ain't sorry for her," and his round eyes sought the crimson pinnacle afar. "She sits with her chin in

her hand—and sometimes she laughs—see—with her eyes—and sometimes when I am sorry for myself she looks so that I feel I dunno how.”

“She looks like your mother, little boy.”

“I never had no muvver,” said Jack, drooping at the corners of his mouth.

“When I was a little boy, I started to climb up, and I climbed high up to the white hem of her dress—so I know she looks like your mother. I had a mother, and because she went for a walk without me the dark spirit came into me, and I said to myself, I will go up into the clouds where they will not find me any more, and be sorry they left me alone. And I went up into the dark gorge, through the wet palms and over the black slippery rocks—up and up—clinging and crawling and climbing. It is very still up there, Jack—and I was afraid and would have come down, but I saw a great bird sail up high into the white soft clouds—and I went on again. The water that came sliding down cold and swift tried to catch my feet, and once it leapt of itself into my face, so that I could not see, but I crawled on. High up I stood on a ledge, and there was on the rock the face of a man carved out of the rock. I stood by him and my head did not come up to his eyes. I turned to see what he was looking at, and below I saw these ruined walls, and I knew why it was his eyes were sad. And then, Jack, the dark spirit left me and I was afraid. I saw I could not climb higher, and I could not climb down—and so I called to the lady to help me, Jack. I called to my mother.”

“So,” whispered Jack, glancing with awe to the snow cone, “did she come?”

“Yes, she came, little boy. How she knew I was there, who can say? but while she was walking with—with him—she turned to look up at that face on the rock, knowing it was there, having been carved by her people—and she saw me. So she climbed up—for he would not—saying, as I had gone up so I could come

down. Over the rocks she went, through the ice-cold water, and up the black wall—never fearing—though a woman is not meant to climb, and when she came near she called to me to be brave. When I saw her coming I started to climb down, and my foot slipped, so that I hung by one hand. Then she cried to me in clear words—‘Look up, my son—look up—and hold fast!’ There was a great pain in my fingers, but I pressed tight to the rock, and held, till by-and-by I felt her hand beneath my foot—and so I got back to the ledge. Then she came up—and she was trembling, and her hands were cut. Ah, little boy, it was a great thing she did.”

“And did you get down?”

“Yes. The man came up, looking stern and white. First he would have helped her, but she gave me to him, and he went down with me hastily, not caring how, so that I was badly hurt. Then he went back for her, and he came down slowly, with great drops on his forehead, and when he at last set her down in safety he leant against the rock with his eyes shut. I thought he was afraid and laughed. Then she, my mother, looked at me as she had never looked before, and I went away home. Ah, boy—little one—it is better for you that you did not know your mother—for you can have no sorrow for her.”

“Where is your mother now?” asked Jack presently.

Tupac’s face suddenly grew hard. “We have spoken enough,” he said harshly.

He went back straight, with the intention of pouring his news into the sympathetic ears of his Marion, and by the time he reached the quinta he was prepared to affirm that he had met the whole tribe of Indians in the ruins. But he was captured at the door by Mrs. Milcent, who led him into a bedroom, where he was so surprised at seeing his big brother all weak and thin in bed, that he forgot to embroider his adventure, and merely remarked, after a long spell of absorbed silence, that a wild man had taken his parrot in the ruins.

Mrs. Milcent, with a parting smile, left the two brothers together, but when the door closed behind her, she leant for a moment against the wall with her hand to her heart. Much watching had tried her firm nerves. Her husband was down by the ruins, and if it was true that Jack had seen a man in hiding there, that man was most likely the dreaded and desperate Indian chief. She snatched up her hat, and hurried out to find the others sauntering towards the ruins. Colonel Colston seemed to be recovered from his fatigue. He was dressed in white flannels, which admirably set off his tall, well-knit figure, and his square shoulders and hard, stern features, by contrast, gave to Ferdinand an appearance of insignificance.

"Miss Dunell wishes to look over the ruins," he said; "will you join us?"

As they entered the long colonnade opposite the old walls, there was the sound of some one running to join them, and looking round they saw Captain Gomez.

"What is it?" said the Colonel sharply.

Gomez, panting after his run, cast a questioning gaze at the ladies.

"Do not mind us," said Miss Dunell.

"Señor," he said, "the ladies must return to the quinta."

"Must!"

"Yes, Señor. The men are ugly. They would not permit that Pedro should be flogged, and they were drinking to get up their courage."

"Ah!" murmured Mrs. Milcent, with a nervous glance at the ruins.

"You have lost your nerve, Gomez. You should have shot Pedro. Go back and tell them that I will see them."

"Señor," said Gomez gravely, "I am not speaking idle words. Go back, I beseech you, and prepare for an attack."

"Perhaps he is right," whispered Ferdinand, "let us return."

"If you say so," said the Colonel softly, with a terrible smile, "and who better than you should know if the men are true or false?"

"Gomez!" came a call, loud and menacing.

They turned swiftly at the sound, which came from the ruins, and at an open door they saw a man standing with a rifle in his hand, and a bird, an old parrot, on his shoulder.

"It is he!" cried Mrs. Milcent.

"My God!" muttered Ferdinand, in a voice of horror. "El Demonio!"

Gomez said nothing, but his eyes seemed to start from his head, and he made the sign of the cross.

The Colonel took a few hasty strides forward, the veins on his forehead swollen.

"Stop," cried Tupac hoarsely, as he raised his rifle, "not now."

The Colonel snapped his whip and glanced round.

"Gomez, your rifle."

Gomez drew a long breath, and stared at the Colonel like some dumb beast trying to express in a look its agony.

"D——n it," cried the Colonel furiously, "your rifle, quick!"

"Peace!" said Gomez solemnly. "My time has come. Leave us."

"Gomez!" came the call again.

"I hear—my God, I hear! Ladies, this is no place for you. Señors, farewell!"

"What the devil has come over you? Ferdinand, take the ladies back. I will see to this," said the Colonel.

"Gomez!" The voice sounded again.

Gomez ran a few yards, then lifted his hand.

"Patience!" he cried to his relentless enemy. Then he turned to the Colonel. "Señor, I have served you

well. This is my last word. No man in this valley is your friend but me, and my course is run. Leave the place, and the country—so farewell. If you would not go, watch night and day.”

The others stood as if rooted to the spot, waiting for the drama to be played out. Mrs. Milcent was white, and her eyes were fixed on the figure in the ruined door, all her courage gone. But Miss Dunell looked with a haughty questioning in her gaze.

Gomez brought his rifle to his shoulder with a swift movement, while his enemy was regarding the other group, standing a few yards away.

“Now is your time,” said the Colonel, in a low voice, “aim at his breast.”

“Sacred Mother of God, do you say so? No! Not at her child,” and he fired into the air, then threw his rifle away, and with a wild convulsive gesture, exposed his breast. The shot came. With a sigh he fell forward.

In a moment those old walls that had looked so soft took on a grimmer aspect, the calm lake wore a darker hue, and in that moment every particular of the changed scene burnt itself deeply on the memory of those who stood pale and appalled at the sudden tragedy. The man at the door, dark and terrible, seemed of some other world, and when he spoke his voice was hollow.

“Go, woman-killer!” he said. “Go, for your time has not yet come.”

The Colonel passed his hand over his eyes and shuddered; then he made a sudden bound for the fallen rifle, but even as he reached for it the stock was shattered by another ball. He stood up with an oath. Then he shrugged his shoulders and smiled, as he faced the other, such a smile as his men had often seen and dreaded, the smile of a man planning some retributive measure.

“You have the advantage now,” he said, “but later on I will have the advantage. Suppose we talk the matter over?” And he made a step forward.

The chief raised his rifle.

The Colonel stopped and looked, with his head thrown back. Then he turned his back on the pointed weapon, and leisurely walked after his companions, taking one long glance at Gomez.

CHAPTER XXV

PRISONERS

MRS. MILCENT flew back, but as she reached the scene of the tragedy she paused to cast a shuddering glance at the poor body, and then, with a despairing glance towards the pyramid, she went down on her knees beside it, for she noticed a slight movement.

Gomez opened his eyes and said, "For the love of God, water".

She ran to the lake, and returning with a soaked handkerchief squeezed a few drops into his mouth.

"Where is he?" he muttered.

"He has gone," she said, casting a fearful look around at the silent walls.

"Señora," spoke the dying man, in gasps, "do not blame him. His wrong—was deep. His Excellency—tell him—he must not—raise his hand—against—the boy."

"The boy!"

"Ay, señora. Tupac! El Demonio. No, he must not. Let the earth—be split—and the cliffs—fall."

His voice died away. His eyes opened and remained riveted on her face, in a fixed stare—glittering, wide-opened, black eyes.

"You are a brave man," she whispered, with tears in her eyes, for he had made no moan about his fate.

He sighed heavily, then feebly made the sign of the cross while he murmured a few words in prayer. When he had done, he smiled, and in smiling, died.

She rose and went on calmly to the pyramid, with the thought that death had no fear, since the rough gaucho had faced it without a tremor, and with thoughts for others in his mind at the very last. She saw her husband on the summit, bent over his work, and she climbed up the rough steps. At the last step she was assisted by some one who leant over and grasped her wrist. To her horror she found, on reaching the platform, that it was the dreaded Indian himself.

"My husband," she said wildly, "has done you no wrong."

"Is that you, my dear?" said Mr. Milcent, looking up from a sheet of paper, which he had spread out on the flat circle. "I have just made a most interesting discovery. I find that the isolated tower in the lake, which legend says is a burial-tower or chalpas, is the exact centre of a line connecting the summer and winter solstice, as restored on the sun circle. Our friend here, who has quite a remarkable grasp of the religious customs of the Incas, suggests it is not a burial-place at all."

"Very interesting," said his wife hurriedly, "but I wish you to return with me now, and," she added, turning to the chief, "we will not harm you."

Tupac inclined his head gravely. He would not have smiled if she had threatened to throw him off the pyramid. "Before you go," he said, with quiet authority, "you must tell me why you study the sun circle."

"Must tell you, my friend?" said Mr. Milcent mildly.

"Yes, and keep nothing back. You must be engaged on some design apart from the movements of the sun. I know that man has devoted his life to the discovery of the treasure that was buried here. In that search he has committed many crimes; and I tell you here that vengeance will overtake him before he lays a hand on the wealth he covets, even in the moment of his triumph, and that those who help him will perish also. Tell me—are your studies of the wisdom and the worship of the

Incas to be at his service, in the accomplishment of this last crime against a scattered people who have neither home nor sanctuary, neither peace nor honour in the land of their fathers?"

"I seek no people's treasures," said Mr. Milcent mildly.

"For yourself, no; but for him, for that man who employs you, yes. You do not deny it. Well, I will force no secret from your lips, but the heart of one who watches the imperial course of the sun is not steeped in darkness, and it will tell you that the hunted survivors of the people who once made this valley echo in their happiness and their religion are the heirs to any treasure, if a treasure exists."

"Why," she said, hesitating a moment longer, "why did you kill Captain Gomez? It was cruel, for he fired in the air."

He shot a terrible look at her from his cold grey eyes, a look that strangely reminded her of Colonel Colston, and set her in arms.

"It was murder!" she said, in ringing tones; "and he forgave you."

"He was the last of them all," was his strange reply, "and I spared him long. Say no more," he continued sternly. "If you knew you would not blame me. I spared him—yes, but he came to me again under the shadow of the ruined place of my people."

When they reached the bottom, Mr. Milcent paused to wipe his glasses. "It is very strange," he muttered, "but there is something great in that savage, an air of force and tragedy, that seems to connect him with these ruins."

They looked up involuntarily, and saw him standing, with bowed head, brooding over the scene outstretched at his feet. Then they went on, he with his hands folded behind him, and she nervously anxious until they had passed the unfortunate gaucho.

An hour later, when they reached the quinta un-

disturbed, the Colonel listened to what they had to say, then broke out, "I wish to God all you people were well out of this place, and I would know how to act, but I'm —— if I can move a yard without having a woman tugging at my coat-tails. Gad! I lived here for years without having trouble, but no sooner does a woman set foot in the valley than everything goes wrong."

"If you will have the mules ready, my niece and my wife and I will leave to-morrow," said Mr. Milcent with spirit.

"Why not to-night?" said the Colonel savagely.

"I think we must trespass on your hospitality, at least for to-night."

The Colonel looked at the other with a glance of pitying contempt.

"Why, man, haven't you realised we are in a corner? You can't leave to-morrow, or the day after, for the simple reason that we are prisoners."

"That is not a subject to joke upon," said Mr. Milcent stiffly.

The Colonel laughed. "Upon my word, Milcent, you are extremely innocent, or unobservant. Did you not notice, as you came in, that there was a man on guard at the gate? Well, that man, myself, Ferdinand, and the Chino scout compose the entire garrison."

"You have not included my husband," said Mrs. Milcent.

"I beg your pardon, madam, and yourself, sir," he concluded, with a curious look.

"Mr. Milcent, perhaps you would like to go on guard?"

"I am quite ready," said that gentleman, who, with his hands folded behind him, in his old unmilitary habit, followed the erect figure of the Colonel out into the yard.

"Quite a fortress," he said, looking round at the strong stone walls, built, by the way, of blocks from the ruins.

"Unfortunately, it requires a larger garrison than we can command; and those very walls will serve as a protection to our foes, since at night we must perforce retire into the house. I have, however, taken measures to lay four mines, but the difficulty is in finding means to discharge them."

"Where are they situated?"

"Two at the rear, and one on either side."

Mr. Milcent went off and stepped the distance, the Colonel watching him with an amused smile.

"Thirty feet, and ten feet for the connection, forty feet. I can connect wires with two of them to a small battery which I possess."

"Splendid! Get your wires out, and at dusk we will connect them. In the meantime I will have the windows barricaded."

Miss Dunell came to the door, and seeing the two gentlemen, ran down the steps.

"Can I be of any assistance?" she asked.

"You?" said the Colonel, "yes, for heaven's sake, Beatrice, get out of that white dress, and put on something grey. White attracts a marksman quicker than any colour."

"But no man would shoot at a woman. And, moreover, you yourself are in white. Seriously, do you think there is any danger? For Mr. Ferdinand has just assured me that the men would never dream of hurting him or me."

"He did, did he? Ah! probably he speaks with knowledge. Not hurt him, eh? And what is he doing?"

"Smoking as usual, and playing the guitar," she said scornfully.

"Well, Beatrice, I don't wish to alarm you, but we certainly are in danger of attack. Now, do get inside like a good girl, and take off that white dress."

"Not unless you change your danger signals," she said saucily.

"Presently, as soon as I have seen my friend

Ferdinand," and he took her arm, as they went up the steps.

"Well, sir," he said a moment later, as he eyed Ferdinand sternly, "let us understand each other. Either you do your share of work with the others or you go out at that gate. Which is it to be?"

"Are you speaking to me?" said Ferdinand, lifting his eyebrows. "If you are, have the goodness to remember that I am not a servant or a soldier; and allow me to add," he said, with a fierce look, "that my patience is nearly exhausted."

"And if it should be, what then, sir?"

"Why, then, Colonel Colston, I may remember some things that you would wish forgotten, and the memory may prove as dangerous to your life as, shall I say, to your love."

The Colonel started. Then he looked long at Ferdinand, who met the cold stare with a glance of triumph.

"A word of what I know," continued Ferdinand, "to Miss Dunell, and your wooing would be cut short. A word to the man who slew Gomez, and your life would be worth less than this whiff of smoke." He drew in a breath from his cigarette, and shot out a cloud of smoke.

"Come with me," said the Colonel. He laid his bony grasp upon the other's arm and jerked him from his seat. Then he caught him by the collar behind, nearly choking him by a sudden twist, forced him out of the room, down the steps, across the yard to the gate.

"Open!" he cried.

The gate was opened by the little scout, and Ferdinand was thrust out. He turned and stood, grasping at his throat, too furious for speech, and with such a look of hate in his eyes that they were almost green.

"My God!" he cried hoarsely, "you will repent this."

"When you have come to your senses," said the Colonel, "you may return."

Ferdinand stood for a moment glaring. Then of a sudden he seemed to control himself. "It is I who will dictate henceforth," he said softly, and with that he walked away towards the toldos, whence all the day there had proceeded the wild shouts of intoxicated men and the shrill, fierce laughter of women.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COLONEL

WHEN the Colonel re-entered the house he met Mrs. Milcent and Miss Dunell.

"What have you done with Mr. Ferdinand?" said the latter, wonderingly.

"I thought he would find more congenial society beyond the walls, and I have turned him out."

"Then you have given them a leader," said Mrs. Milcent.

"I call it intolerable," cried the younger lady, with a stamp of her foot.

"What is intolerable?"

"Why, that Mr. Ferdinand should be sent out into danger and ourselves deprived of his help, simply because——"

"Because he liked to entertain you. You are a very clever girl, Beatrice, but you have no sense of proportion. If you had you would realise that these men you amuse yourself with are dangerous in this place."

"I confess I can see no signs of danger, and I believe if I went out and spoke to those picturesque rascals they would instantly come to heel. Colonel Colston has no tact—no idea of controlling but by force—and in the end it will answer neither with men nor women."

"Hush, my dear. Don't speak so lightly. If you wish to help, wait on our two invalids. They need cheering, and I must attend to my duties in the larder."

Beatrice went slowly upstairs, with a sigh of weariness.

She found the two invalids, with Jack, on the flat roof, which was well protected by a high parapet, the opening to the patio forming a well in the centre. Miss Colston, with her arm in a sling, was sitting back in an easy chair, looking through half-closed eyes up at the far-off mountain peak, and Elmore, covered with a rug, had his eyes fixed on her face. He was pale and haggard, but the fever had left him, and with it the anxious careworn look that he had worn since Jack's disappearance. The joy of meeting the little brother had proved a wonderful tonic, and, though he had a great yearning for information to clear up many doubts, he was for the present content to sit and watch the sad, beautiful face near him, while Jack talked.

As she stepped to the roof they both turned, and then Marion shot one swift glance at Elmore.

"Don't rise, please. If it were not that I knew you were in the house I should have thought you were shadows—so still and worn you look."

"I must apologise," said Elmore. "I had the misfortune to fall ill, otherwise I should express more clearly my surprise and pleasure at meeting you here."

She moved forward gracefully, without a trace of emotion in her clear-cut features, and gave her hand to Elmore, who grasped it a moment in his lean fingers. "It is a place of strange meetings and strange performances, is it not, Miss Colston? Your father has just added to our experiences by sending Mr. Ferdinand out into the power of the enemy."

"Enemy! What enemy?"

"Did you not know we are besieged, and that all the gauchos have turned against us?"

Elmore staggered to his feet. "They will need my help," he muttered, and his glance went by Miss Dunell to Marion.

"Do you not know, sir," she said, gently forcing him back into his chair, "that you are in need of our help, and that, as far as I can understand, for the story is

wrapped in darkness, you have already received much care and service from Miss Colston?"

He looked again at Marion, whose face was covered with a bright blush.

"The story, I believe, is quite romantic. A mysterious message, a more mysterious stranger, a terrible night in a solitary toldo, a household aroused at midnight, and in the morning the arrival of two patients. I should like to hear the whole romance, Miss Colston."

"I told you," said Marion, "that Mr. Elmore was ill in the hut."

"I am sure I could not have left him in better hands," said Miss Dunell softly, with an amused smile. "But pray do give us a complete account."

Elmore rose again. "I do not think we will trouble Miss Colston, but I may say this, that from my heart I thank her for whatever she has done."

"You could say no less," said Miss Dunell; "yet were I a man I think I would kiss the lady's hand."

"Thank you!" said Elmore. He advanced, and stooping, pressed his lips to the hand in the sling, that lay against her heaving breast.

Beatrice laughed, not very pleasantly.

"It is cruel," said Marion, with a flash of her dark eyes, "to make sport."

"God forbid!" he said earnestly; but she rose, and, refusing his assistance, moved away.

"I do not know, Miss Dunell, what service she has rendered me, but I gather that, at any rate, you refused your help."

"And is there any reason why I should be singled out to do duty at your side, Mr. Elmore?"

"I was fool enough at one time to think I might have had a claim to your sympathy."

"Events have hastened since then, and if I am not mistaken there is opening another page—one more thrilling." She went to the parapet, leant her elbows on the wall, and looked over.

"Yes, here they come, swaggering in their coloured blankets, like a band of naughty children."

Elmore joined her, and a glance showed him a throng of gauchos advancing with unsteady steps and swinging their rifles recklessly.

"See, there is Mr. Ferdinand behind, standing with folded arms and gloomy brow." She waved her hand. "Do you see him?"

"I see him," said Elmore. "The man's a traitor and a rogue. You should not recognise him."

The men saw her and acknowledged her presence with noisy shouts and ribald laughter, and the look of disdain she had meant for Elmore was reserved for them. They came on, a disorderly and noisy rabble, till they were within a few yards of the gate, when they stopped and yelled for "Colston," varied with cries of "El Tigre". Then they saw the Colonel's tall figure rapidly cross the yard, a heavy Colt's revolver in either hand.

"Do you want me?" he said softly, with his hand upon the bolt of the gate.

Those in the front rank fell back a step, and were silent, but those behind laughed savagely, and one man called out, "We want your head, Colston."

"You mutinous dogs!" he roared, and suddenly flinging the gate open, advanced upon them, firing with both weapons. Some few stood long enough to fire wildly, but the rest fled at once, those in front diving with lowered heads into their comrades, upsetting some, who crawled away. Two men rolled over, not to again rise, and others, as they ran, yelled with pain. The Colonel picked up a rifle and shot a man as he ran, and the rest at once dropped to cover, each man behind a rock, and as he returned carrying several rifles with him, bullets struck up the dust above his feet, and one, aimed high, whizzed over the house.

"Drop down!" said Elmore, placing his hand on Miss Dunell's arm.

She shook his grasp off, and kept her eyes fixed with a breathless interest on the Colonel until he had closed the gate, when, without a word she turned and flew to the stairs, meeting him as he mounted to the verandah, with the fierce light of battle yet in his eyes.

"It was splendid!" she said, with her head up. "You looked like a lion among them. I saw it all from the roof."

He stared at her for a moment without recognition, then he grunted: "I wish you women would keep in your proper place. There now," he continued, in a softer tone, as she drew back hurt, "I did not mean to scold you, but you must not expose yourselves to danger."

"I left Mr. Elmore on the roof, and he is anxious to slay, though he can scarcely stand. I presume he may enjoy the privilege of courting danger."

"I will see him," and he gave her a keen look. He took a rifle and a case of cartridges and went heavily up the stairs. Elmore was in his chair, exhausted by his effort.

"Elmore," he said, as he stepped on to the roof, "I have done you a wrong. I do not ask you to forgive me, and I do not much wish it. But, you see, you and your friends are in danger. If you are strong enough to use a rifle in their defence I would be obliged."

"You have done me a wrong; and you admit it," said Elmore bitterly. "Yes, you have done me the greatest wrong that one man could do another, by using me first as an unconscious tool to further your calculated scheme of robbery, and then by stealing a poor inoffensive child. I have heard that it is not the first time you have used your strength against an infant."

It was a hard shot, and the hard soldier reeled under it.

"Again!" he muttered hoarsely. "Who told you that?"

"Give me the rifle," said Elmore, forgetting his own

grievance in the deadly pallor that overspread the other's face.

"Who told you? Speak, man, speak—lest I force the words from you."

"Do you threaten a sick man, Colonel Colston? Think that I spoke idly if you like, from some gossip of Pedro, the muleteer, one of your meanest accomplices, whom I saw among the rabble outside."

The Colonel passed his hand across his brow and sighed heavily. "You touch me on a raw spot, Elmore."

"And do you think it was nothing to me when you robbed me of my brother?"

"It was not at my suggestion."

"But you are responsible for the acts of your servants. Give me the rifle. I will do what I can. The reckoning between you and me can wait."

The weapon and ammunition were handed over.

The Colonel stood hesitating, with a look almost of embarrassment in his face. Then he cleared his throat.

"Before I go," he said, "I may tell you that I have done you another wrong. I have made court to Miss Dunell, and she has promised to be my wife. Good-night."

Elmore sat a few moments perfectly still, his eyes fixed on the trap-door by which the other had descended. But the look on his face was one of amazement rather than of grief, and when at last he rose, there was a brighter look in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TOWER

MR. MILCENT had worked all the afternoon with absorbed interest over a little battery, and by the evening he had completed the connection with two of the mines.

"All we have to do now," he said to the Colonel, "is to connect the wires at the psychological moment, and two explosions will result simultaneously."

"Thanks, Milcent. Now it would be as well if you retired; for I don't anticipate trouble until the early morning."

"I would rather sit up. I should like to work out a plan I was engaged upon this morning, and should any trouble occur I would be on the spot to attend to the battery. The Indian I met at the sun circle threw out a suggestion that the lake tower was not a burial tower; and it occurs to me that it may be connected with some subterranean passage, and in all probability that passage would follow some fissure in the rock, extending no doubt from the cliff. I propose to take the tower as a centre and draw radiating lines."

"Not a burial tower?" interrupted the Colonel keenly. "You have not mentioned the subject, I hope, to Mr. Ferdinand? Ah, well, we will talk of that, sir, when we have punished these mutinous dogs." He left the room for the courtyard, where he found the Chino scout and young Gomez sitting side by side, with their rifles across their knees. He sat down by them, and filling his pipe began to smoke. They sat on in silence while the dark-

ness deepened, and fireflies awaking to their hour circled in and out between them, and huge bats wheeled overhead, now high, now low, their leathery wings sometimes fanning their faces. From the far-off forest could be heard the muffled booming of the spider monkeys, the valley acting as a natural funnel for the transmission of sound, but near at hand the noise made by the truculent band of ruffians had stilled. From the lake of course there came an intermittent babble from the wild fowl, and from far overhead the occasional harsh call of swans, but their trained ears took no note of those familiar sounds. When the pipe was smoked the Colonel knocked out the ashes and took his flask, which he handed to the scout. There was a gurgling sound twice repeated, and young Gomez handed the flask back.

"We will attack," said the Colonel quietly.

The two men rose up and shed their ponchos. Then they moved outside the gate, where two of them waited while the little Indian made the circuit of the wall at the Colonel's command. On completing the circuit they went cautiously on towards the toldos, which were plunged in a suspicious silence. Presently the dark row of huts stood out like a wall and the three men went down full length for a long scrutiny, but there was no light, nor sound, nor movement.

"They must all be drunk," muttered the Colonel in disgust.

"No, señor. They have gone."

"Gone! Where to? They cannot have left the valley, surely?"

"We shall see."

The Indian went crouching off on a circle, feeling the ground with his bared feet, and fingering now one article and then another, that had been dropped by the people. When he had made the circuit he found that the articles had been dropped on the side towards the lake; and the beat he made was up and down a length of ground farther out in that direction.

"They have gone," he said, on his return, "to the water or to the foot of the cliff beyond."

The scout struck out into the dark with confidence, though now they had the tall cliffs before them, shutting out the lower half of the heavens, it was impossible even to see an arm's length. As they advanced they heard more distinctly the contented gabble of the wild fowls as they fed, and finally reached the pebbly shores of the lake, which they silently skirted for some distance before they saw a sign of those they followed, in the glare of fires. These fires were between the pyramid and the cliff, and threw that solid structure into relief, as well as the tall tower that rose out of the lake. They could make out also the forms of sentinels moving to and fro.

"Mother of God!" cried young Gomez, in a voice of horror. "Look!"

"What is it?" said the Colonel, cocking his rifle.

"See! On the chalpas! It is the Evil One!" And he made a sign of the cross rapidly in the air.

The Chino scout looked, and with a muffled cry prostrated himself on the sand.

At first Colonel Colston could see nothing; but on stooping a little he saw something which shook even his iron nerve—the dim outline of a figure, or rather an uncertain faintly luminous object that waved like some huge palm leaf, and this luminous streak went down over the column in a thin line, like the gleam of water, into the lake.

"It is the god of the Incas. Out of the waters, that are his own, has he come. Quexacotl, the god of the ruins and the floods, of the thunder and lightning. Back to the place of his worship. Back to punish and to overwhelm," the scout wailed, but did not look again. "It is a sign."

"Yes," muttered young Gomez, "it is a sign. Let us go!" and he crossed himself fearfully.

"Whatever it be, a bullet should reach him easily, whether god or devil, Indian or renegade!" and the

Colonel went down on his knee to get a clearer outline for his shot.

"Shoot not!" cried the scout, stretching out his hand to the barrels.

"I have not seen you afraid before," said the Colonel sternly.

"Afraid I am not, of man or beast, but of the spirits I am afraid. No man ever climbed the smooth surface of that tower, and it is not fit even to talk concerning it. Tales I have heard of men who have looked upon such forms as that, and been burnt trunks at a single glance from the offended god. Ay, and I have seen where, hidden in the forest, lie the walls of a lost city, the bones of men lying white on the broad steps, with the faces of god done in stone, looking out angrily."

"You never told me before of that city," said the Colonel, making good his rest for another aim.

"No, señor, for I vowed never to return, and you would have ordered me to lead you. I saw, over the bones of the men, into a wide hall, and in the centre stood a great image, and above it the waving head of a great serpent, alive."

"A serpent! That's what it is." The fire leapt in a red tongue from his rifle. At the sharp smack of the report on the lake, the water-fowl rose with a mighty clatter of wings, and with wild cries went circling high overhead. But above the clamour broke out a resounding splash, as if the column itself had fallen.

"It has gone. I have killed it."

Young Gomez fled, but the scout leaped to his feet in a frenzy.

"Why have you done this?" he cried. "Is your pride so great that you will war against the gods? Man of blood, do you respect nothing?"

"Be still, man. There is something swimming towards us; and the gauchos are alarmed. Be quiet, I say."

From the distant fires came the sound of men shouting

to each other, and as they looked the fires went suddenly out, as one by one the embers were scattered, leaving an intense darkness. The tower could no more be seen, nor the strange luminous streak, but the water of the lake lapped on the pebbles at their feet in tiny waves, and a rippling noise came from beyond, growing louder.

The Colonel seized the scout by his arm and forced him into a sitting posture, and he maintained his iron grasp, for the man trembled as if he had the ague. Presently the rippling stopped, and a faint spot of light appeared out of the dark waters, to disappear again as the rippling was renewed, and to gleam again nearer while the sound again fell away. This was repeated again and again as they knelt with their eyes straining to see what thing it was, until suddenly, the waters parted a few yards away, and a shower of golden fire-drops fell with a tinkle into the water from a height of several feet. The drops fell as if they had been scattered by some mysterious hand, leaving no visible trace of the source whence they came; but after an interval of terrible silence, there was a splash that threw the water into their faces, followed by a loud hiss.

The scout wrenched his hand loose and rolled over, then emitted a yell of fear and agony. The Colonel saw for an instant a dark body whirled into the air, arms and legs outspread, heard the splash as the body fell into the lake, then, as he turned to fly, he was struck a heavy blow between the shoulders which hurled him to the ground. He lay a few moments dazed, then in a wild rage he sprang to his feet, and drawing his hunting-knife, went back to the water's edge, listening for some sound to guide him. He heard it, the sound of something crawling from the water, and he almost drove his blade into the body of the scout, when a spluttering cough from the man warned him in time. Sheathing his knife, after one furious look around, he caught the man up and bore him away from the lake, then sought for the rifles, and returned to his man.

The scout was sitting up when he went back.

"Behold," he said calmly, "my leg is broken where the god seized me. It was not I who offended him, and he spared my life; yet he let you live. Better a broken leg than life in fear of his vengeance."

The Colonel swore under his breath, and took a step, as if he would return to the lake, but the voices of the renegades were nearer, and his shoulders ached. So he picked up the scout without further speech, gave him the rifles, and blundered on through the dark with his teeth set, while every laboured breath cut him like a knife.

When the door was opened, the Colonel had just sufficient strength to lay his burden down and to draw himself erect, as Miss Dunell, in a charming dressing-gown and with her glorious hair down, stood at the door.

"What has happened?" she said. "Can I help?"

"No," he said, with an effort, "my scout has met with an accident, and he must be seen to at once. Good-night, dear."

"Good-night," she whispered, and smiled at him and lingered.

Mrs. Milcent gently forced her out and closed the door, then she turned quickly to the Colonel, who was standing with one hand on the table supporting himself, a fixed smile on his face. She put her arms round his waist and guided him to a chair. His head rolled on his shoulders and his arms fell limp. The man of iron had fainted for the first time in his life. The little lady put her hands to her head and looked from the grim white face, with its closed eyes, to the black, glittering orbs of the scout. A queer smile crossed the face of the Indian, and his hooked nose came down over his thin lips.

"Indian can wait," he said.

If the gauchos had attacked then the quinta would have been easily captured, but the rifle shot fired at the lake had frightened them, and Mrs. Milcent looked to her new patients without being disturbed. Her husband,

who had been sitting at his post, absorbed in a new set of calculations, came in to help her, asking no questions and doing everything he was told.

"You are positively wonderful," said his wife. "You work without fuss and yet with such thoroughness. It is quite a pleasure to work with you."

"Thank you, my dear, thank you; but I simply do what you direct, and I am humiliated."

"You have no cause," she said gently, "for reproach."

"Have I not? God forgive me, but I had sometimes set myself as on a different plane to you, the bravest of them all."

"If you say another word," she said with a sob, "I shall cry."

Then they went on with their work in silence, and presently the Colonel opened his eyes and glared round the room, from one to the other.

"What the devil——" he began, lifting his hand to his wet hair.

"You fainted."

"Fainted! I! Did she—did Beatrice see?"

"No, she had gone."

"Thank God!" he said fervently.

CHAPTER XXVIII

YOUR SON!

SHE took his heavy shooting coat off, then with a pair of scissors cut away his shirt, disclosing an ugly bruise as large as a saucer.

"A perfect circle!" muttered Mr. Milcent.

The scout raised his head to look, and he cried out excitedly—

"The totem! The Inca totem—the sign of the Sun-God!"

"The sign of the devil!" muttered the Colonel sourly. "It was made by an anaconda that came out of the lake. I saw him on the tower—your tower, Mr. Milcent, though how the devil he climbed up passes my reasoning. I am not joking. The brute fell when I shot, and, coming softly upon us, caught the scout by the leg and flung him into the water, then struck me between the shoulders as I was about to run."

"What horrors!" murmured Mrs. Milcent, falling back with hands clasped, and gazing with wild eyes at the awful mark.

"Did you carry this man all that way, after receiving such a hurt?"

"He did not walk, sir. But while we talk those renegades may already be creeping upon us. I presume there is no one on guard. Give me a glass of brandy, madam, and I will take a turn round."

"You will do nothing of the sort," she said.

"I will go," said Mr. Milcent; but when he opened

the door he found young Gomez there. The young gaucho, who looked very much ashamed of himself, reported that there was no one near the house, and he entered with an awkward air to ask forgiveness. The remainder of the night went by without any alarm, and the day was far advanced before there were any signs of the enemy. Then six men passed the quinta on the way to the river, stopping to fire a harmless volley at the house, by way of expressing their intentions. About noon Elmore, with the aid of glasses, saw a man on the summit of the pyramid, and informed the Colonel, who was taking a prolonged spell of rest in an easy chair, his back still painful.

"It is Ferdinand!"

"What is he doing there, do you think?" asked Elmore, noting the other's frowning brow.

"He is no doubt trying to unravel the puzzle," said Miss Dunell. "You may have spent hours, Mr. Elmore, trying to unravel a Chinese ring puzzle. The Incas, apparently, have surpassed the Chinese as much in ingenuity as in the colossal size of their properties. This entire valley was scarcely large enough to give them free scope, and they called in the aid of the sun. Mr. Ferdinand is no doubt wondering at the present moment whether the treasure was buried under the pyramid upon which he stands, under the lake, or in the forest of the Montana. You do not seem excited."

"I have heard of the buried treasure before; and I fear it has no other existence than in the minds of those men who were responsible for that wicked fraud in connection with the so-called Condor mine."

"From whom did you hear of the treasure?" asked the Colonel, with a sidelong look.

"From the man you call El Demonio—my friend."

"Not a very creditable source, but since you have mentioned him, I should like to know how it was you came into his company."

"If you wish to know, Colonel Colston, I will tell you.

He offered me his aid when I was attacked by two hired ruffians, and without any advantage to himself he linked his fortunes with mine, and helped me through sickness and through danger to find my brother."

"Well, I understand he has thrown in his lot with those men over there. You have my permission to join him, and the sooner you leave the better."

"I do not believe," said Elmore hotly, "that the chief is with them. He held them in too much contempt. What proof have you?"

"You do not quite realise your position," said the Colonel, with a hard smile. "I found you with a man who was and is my enemy. That man signalled his arrival in this valley by shooting my captain. He is still free, while I am besieged. Yet you, who are really my prisoner, demand proofs from me. If you remain here, will you fight against all who may attack me? Are you prepared to do that? Are you prepared to shoot this chief, if he raises his hand against me?"

Marion had drawn near, and looked at Elmore with a glance that held his gaze.

"Well, sir, your answer?"

"No, Colonel Colston," he said hoarsely.

"Not even for your brother's sake?"

"No!" came the barely whispered reply.

"My daughter has risked her life for you. Perhaps for her sake!" The Colonel spoke sternly now, and there was a command in his eyes.

"My God!" said Elmore wildly, "why do you try me so? It is not just."

"Father, I will not be a party to this—this cruel, cowardly barter."

"Not even for her sake?" went on that inexorable voice.

"No!" shouted Elmore, with a white face. "I will not. But take care, sir, how you pit your daughter against your——"

"Well—against whom? My enemy or your friend?"

Elmore stood silent for some seconds. He looked from the hard face, that was set like a rock in a fixed resolve, to Marion, whose eyes were searching his with a startled look.

"Against your son!" he said solemnly.

A deep sigh escaped from Marion. "My brother!" she murmured. "I knew it. I have felt ever since that night in the toldo that some one dear to me was near me."

"You lie!" cried her father, in a voice hoarse with passion and the sudden shock. "—, you lie!"

Marion laid her hand on Elmore's arm, with a look of wonder and joy in her glorious eyes. "Tell me, what is he like—my brother?"

"Your brother," he said, looking steadily at the Colonel, "is a man you may be proud of. He is brave and true, wiser than his years, with your father's grey eyes, the hooked nose and the dark skin of the Incas."

"I have no son," cried the Colonel, clutching at his breast. "It is a lie, I say! Some devilish invention to wound me! But, by heaven——"

"It is the truth, Colonel Colston!"

"Enough, enough. Another word and I will forget you are in my house. Marion, go to your room. You, sir, come with me."

Marion held out her hands imploringly, but her father folded his arms and gave her such a look as he must have turned upon her mother. She shuddered, swayed, and would have fallen had not Miss Dunell caught her in her arms.

"Thank God," she said, looking up, her face white and scornful, "I have seen in time a glimpse of your heart."

He bowed, then beckoned to Elmore, and the two went heavily down the stairs.

Mrs. Milcent, having had a long-needed rest, met them on the stairs.

"Where are you going?"

"Out for a little fresh air," said the Colonel, calling up a wintry smile.

"Do not go far, and for goodness' sake come back again. I really must have a rest from nursing. Mr. Elmore," she whispered, as he passed, "I sent a message to your friend early this morning."

They crossed the yard and the Colonel opened the gate.

"Go!" he said, "and may the devil take you; for a more devilish lie than you spoke has not been uttered."

"My God! Is it possible that you turn me out, defenceless and weak?"

"Ay, that and more, for if you return other than as a suppliant, I will shoot you. Now begone; your friends will welcome you." He barred the gate, and walked back to the house.

Elmore leant against the gate, for his strength had not yet come back, and the very force of his rage further weakened him. He was furious and ashamed, for though no physical force had been used, he had tamely obeyed the command of a stronger will, and had surrendered his advantage by quitting the house, where every one apparently was with him. He grasped the gate and shook it as far as his feeble strength would allow, then with a despairing gesture he staggered away to a rock, where he sat down with his face in his hands. He had been sitting so for some time, staring blankly, when he started to the sound of a voice calling him. Looking round, he saw Marion's face at the gate, and it wanted but that to complete his bitter humiliation. He rose up and stood looking at her coldly.

"Come nearer!" she whispered, with trembling lips.

He went closer, and his rage and weakness found vent in words he would have recalled.

"You have been right," he said harshly, "in your advice. Your knowledge of your father's designs was correct. Have you come to tell me to make terms, to go down on my knees, for if so, you need not give me the message."

She stood back a step while the rich blood rushed into her pale cheeks. Then, with a sudden movement, she bared her arm, and showed him the inflamed mark still red upon the glowing skin.

"For your sake," she said proudly, "when you were helpless in the hut."

He lowered his head in sudden humiliation.

"Forgive me!" he murmured, "forgive me! I did not know what I was saying."

"Yet you had cause," she replied, as swiftly relenting.

"And that was for me?" he said, with his eyes fixed on the angry scar. "It was not worth so much pain, and for every throb and pang of it I am the deeper in your debt. Yet what can I do?"

She drew her arm into the sling, under cover of a black mantilla.

"Was it true? Tell it me again. Have I a brother?"

"Too true!"

"Why, why do you say it so? Is it not cause for joy to find a brother?"

"Yes, but——"

"Speak! Quickly! What is it you are keeping back? I can bear anything—so that I know I may meet him. You told me he was wise and brave."

"Marion, your brother and your father are enemies."

"They can be reconciled. That is why I came to you. You can, you must find him, and bring him here. If they meet, God will find a way to unite them."

"If he could only see you first, you might win him over."

"I?" she said, with sweet wonder in her eyes. "I am only a woman."

"Only a woman!" he murmured passionately. "Only a noble-hearted woman, thank God."

Her eyes dropped, a smile came and went.

"Don't forget," she whispered. "Your little Jack is safe with me," and she slipped away while he stood and watched. Her father came out as she reached the

verandah, and stood aside to let her pass, without a word; he carried his rifle, and he pointed towards the lake.

Elmore looked to the tall figure, whose stiff pose seemed to express all the hardness, iron resolve, and pride, then turned his steps towards the ruins, all his anger replaced by a feeling of love and pity for his enemy's daughter. He walked slowly, buried in thought, and almost blundered against a figure who had for some minutes been watching him. It was the man himself—her brother. After his first start their hands met in a strong grasp.

"You look ill, my brother. How is it you are out and unarmed?"

"I have been turned out—ejected, as a friend of yours," said Elmore thoughtlessly, and with a laugh.

Tupac's brow grew dark. He wheeled round, raised his rifle and fired at the figure still standing erect on the verandah.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FIRST ATTACK

ANOTHER night and morning went by without any sign from the gauchos, a time of intense misery to every one in the house except to Jack, who sat on the verandah playing knuckle-bones with the Chino-Indian and young Gomez. In the morning the six men who had passed towards the river returned with a canoe which they launched on the lake. With a glass it could be seen that two other men entered the canoe, which was paddled straight for the red column, and Colonel Colston, who had watched their movements, closed his glass with a vicious snap and walked to and fro the beat of the roof, trying to form some plan by which he could regain his ascendancy.

"What has you done with my brother?"

The Colonel started and frowned. Already his hair was greyer, the lines in his face deeper, and his eyes were not pleasant to look upon.

"Where is my brother? I want to know, see!"

He stared the little boy down and with an impatient gesture motioned him away.

"I'se tired," said the little chap, with a droop of his lip. "All the peoples sit still, and the house makes me sick. I want to go out, don't you?"

The Colonel twisted his moustaches, but he remained silent. The boy moved forward, with his eyes intently studying the stern face, and he stretched his hand timidly forth. The other covered it with his strong

fingers, and together they walked up and down, the little legs twinkling to keep pace with the long strides. At each turn the boy went wide, to peer up at the grim straight mouth and frowning brow.

"Did you," he said, at one of these turns, "have any chilluns?"

"Little chap, you hurt me!" And the big man caught the boy up and seated him on his shoulder to escape the scrutiny of his clear eyes.

"My!" with a sigh of content. "I can see all round and away. There's a white cloud on the mountain and it rolls down always, without coming any nearer, and there's a black cloud over the trees in the forest, but it does not come closer either, but it seems to go down into the trees."

"That means rain, little boy."

"Brother went into the big forest and he will get wet. He went with the man from the stones. I see'd him, and his nose is bent like the parrot's; and they've went to the forest where the rain falls, for the Indians."

"Who told you that?" said the Colonel sharply, coming to a stop.

Jack drummed with his heels. "Gee up. Oh, I know. The parrot told me, and there's a Big Thing in the water that has eyes but cannot see. He lies still an' listens, and he creeps like a shadow through the water an' he listens some more, and once I see'd a great white bird go down under the water and never come up, and there was a white feather in the mouth of the Big Thing when I see'd him again."

"You have been speaking to the Indian downstairs. You must not listen to what he says. There is no Big Thing."

"He can't speak at all, see? And there is a Big Thing, long as the shadow of a tall tree over there in the water. My! I can see the water, and there's people over there coming in a line, with the shine of the sun over them like fire."

The Colonel wheeled round to the parapet, and a glance showed him a line of armed men advancing. He put Jack down.

"Run downstairs and tell the Indian that I want him. See how quick you can be."

In a few seconds the scout was on the roof, and the Colonel, leaving him there to keep watch, went down to see that the door was properly fastened, and to give instructions to Mr. Milcent. Then, picking up a box of ball cartridge, he returned. The three ladies went up also and watched the advance of the gauchos malos, who were now near enough to form a rich line of colour in the blue of their striped ponchos. When two hundred yards away they halted—grounding their rifles—and one man, with a white rag fluttering from his hand, came on leisurely, smoking a cigarette. This was Pedro; and when he had approached the wall he doffed his broad sombrero to the group, who were watching him in anxious silence from the roof.

"I salute you, bonitas mosas, in the hope that you have not found the time heavy. His Excellency, Don Ferdinand, offers his regrets at the lack of hospitality, and his assurance that he has no wish to make war on ladies for whom he has the greatest respect and admiration."

"Come to your message," said Colonel Colston sternly.

"His Excellency also desires me to say that he is aware that the quarrel is only between him and El Tigre, señor, and that if that person is given up he will receive fair trial according to the military law governing the band."

"Further?"

"Further, that when the Señor Colston is given up, all the others in the quinta may remain as the guests of his Excellency, or, if they decide to leave, will have proper escort to the Sierras."

"And if your gracious offer is declined?"

Pedro shrugged his shoulders. "Well, in that case, we shall be obliged to use force; and the Señor Colston doubtless knows that my comrades would not act gently."

"Down!" roared the Colonel. "Sit down!" And with his hands he thrust Mrs. Milcent and Beatrice to their knees, as the ruffians suddenly fired and the bullets whistled overhead and smacked against the wall, followed by the sharp report.

An instant later two answering shots were fired from the roof, and when the Colonel looked for his rifle he saw it in his daughter's hands.

"Get me my little gun, Jack," she said; "this is too heavy. You will find it in my room."

A bullet whizzed viciously between him and her, and a piece of mortar from another shot flew into the air.

"Marion, sit down, you'll be hit." She was aiming again, the left elbow on the parapet, and the white arm showing, and her father noticed that the rifle was steady. At the report she lifted her head to see the result.

Then he put his hand on her shoulder, and took the rifle away.

No one had noticed Jack, but now his flushed face appeared above the trap-door, and he ran forward with the light Winchester.

"What are you shooting?" he cried. "Let me shoot too." Mrs. Milcent caught him in her arms, while he struggled to get free.

Colonel Colston smiled. "Take him below," he whispered. But Jack struggled. "I will be good, let me sit in the corner."

Marion fired rapidly. "I want more cartridges; bring me cartridges."

"I know," cried Jack eagerly, "I will get the belt," and he dived down.

"Marion, I cannot allow this."

"Father, you sent Mr. Elmore away. I will take his place till he returns. If you send me downstairs I will go into the court."

"Look out!" cried the scout warningly. "They are coming nearer."

The Colonel cast one perplexed look at his daughter, who was filling the chamber of her Winchester, and then went to the parapet. The gauchos, in true guerilla fashion, had taken advantage of every hollow and cover that offered, and except for the puffs of smoke that formed a crescent with the horns advanced, their whereabouts could scarcely be seen. Here and there a man showed his shoulder as he rolled over to get at his cartridge, and in one or two places a man's legs could be seen. At the sound of the rapid firing Mr. Milcent and Gomez came up, each with his rifle, and began firing.

The Colonel stood up, showing his head and shoulders clear above the parapet. Immediately a man rose to a kneeling position and took aim at this conspicuous mark, while several others fired more hurriedly, the bullets hissing by the Colonel's head.

Mr. Milcent fired and missed, but a second later Marion's rifle spoke, and the gaucho sank back, then rolled over, his bullet flying high.

The Colonel looked at his daughter as he took shelter again, and held out his hand to her.

"Brave girl!" he whispered.

"Is he dead?" she whispered.

"I hope so," and rising, he selected his mark coolly and fired, then looked at her again. The excitement had passed away, and she was leaning against the parapet, with her eyes closed, and a look of deadly pallor in her face. He lightly stroked her hair, and she opened her eyes.

"I won't forget," he said, "you saved my life, but that is not all. I am proud of you."

She smiled faintly.

"Poor child!" cried Mrs. Milcent, with a sob.

He took her up gently and presenting a fair mark walked towards the trap-door, while a second storm of bullets from every watchful marksman swept over his



MARION'S RIFLE SPOKE, AND THE GAUCHO SANK BACK

head. Then he disappeared, and Mrs. Milcent, creeping along the roof, followed with Jack, who had grown silent with terror. When he returned he found Miss Dunell with the discarded Winchester in her hand. Twice she had essayed to imitate Marion, but each time her eyes had appeared above the parapet, the wasp-like whizz of a bullet had sent her crouching down.

"No," he said, "one is enough, and Marion has been used to firearms."

"Don't be alarmed," she replied, with a scornful laugh at her own weakness. "I am too much of a coward to face the danger."

"God forbid that you should! But you may hand me the cartridges and you will be doing a great service."

"Thank you," she said, and began feeding him with feverish energy, so that he had to fire more rapidly than he cared, to keep up with her. But the rapid fire daunted the gauchos, who retired.

CHAPTER XXX

THE SECOND ASSAULT

IN the night they barricaded the verandah, then they all gathered on the roof, excepting Mr. Milcent, who had employed himself before dusk in stretching a wire before each of the doors outside, and connecting them with a bell in the patio which would ring out an alarm if the wires were touched, and who was now engaged in the study compounding some strange fire-balls. A common danger had reunited the party, the ladies forgetting the harshness of the Colonel, which had so bitterly offended them a few hours since, in the comfort which they derived from his courage and calm confidence in himself. He sat and talked to them of the dangers he had encountered, of the battles he had fought and won, of his many trials against man and beast, and while they leant forward fascinated, sometimes darting uneasy glances into the dark over their shoulders, the eyes of the two scouts gleamed as they drank in the tales of blood and war, the old Indian half-breed occasionally accentuating a thrilling passage with a deep guttural exclamation.

"I wish," said Mrs. Milcent, after a long pause, "we were back in London; that these tedious fire-flies were the lights of hansoms in Piccadilly, and that mysterious, melancholy, forbidding murmur from the Montana was the roar of the dear old city and its peaceful multitudes. Don't you, Marion?"

Miss Colston smiled sadly. "No, no," she said, "I

have no craving for Europe. This is my home. Here I could be content to live, for there is to my ear a sweeter music in the hum from the forest, a greater majesty in the gloomy cañon, and frowning walls of rock and towering mountain, a greater peace in the ruined courts of the vanished people who once lived here, than the greatest city in the world can furnish."

"But the brigands, my child; those ferocious gauchos who war against women, more venomous than the horrible spiders and serpents which make one's shortest walk a martyrdom."

"The gauchos do not belong to this fair scene. I would sweep them away if I had the power, the ladrones!"

"I can believe it now," said Mrs. Milcent, with a little sigh. "What spirit you showed! What courage! What a heroine they would make of you in London drawing-rooms."

"Well, I do not wish to be made a heroine of."

"But you are one, whether you wish it or no. You have your father's spirit."

"I hope not," said Marion quietly.

"But you have!" interposed the Colonel grimly. "I did not think so until to-day, but when your brows came down in an angry frown, as you fired without flinching to the scream of the bullets, I saw you were a soldier's daughter."

"I did it," she said, "for the sake of little Jack. Father, there is something higher than bravery."

"Let us have no preaching, for Heaven's sake," he said impatiently.

"Yet," said Mrs. Milcent, "it would be well if you listened—for Heaven's sake."

"I don't think you need trouble about the fate of Mr. Elmore," was the careless reply. "He enjoys a great deal more freedom than we do, and I should not be surprised if in the end he were in a position with his freedom and the assistance of the Montana Indians to

dictate terms to us. With that opinion I think I may declare this council of war closed."

He took an impatient turn up and down, then stood gnawing at his moustache. Twice recently his armour of selfishness had been pierced, and he was restless, with a restlessness that might justify his title of "The Tiger," by some sudden ferocious outbreak of ungovernable rage. Age had brought with it some power of restraint, and he stood and fought out the battle with himself.

"My son!" he muttered hoarsely. "What a damnable lie! And yet how it clamours. I had no son. If I had, to-day, perhaps, he would have been at my side with her. Who, then, is this man that crosses my path? What did Elmore say of him? That he was brave, and true, and a leader. Ah, Huala, is he son of thine? Did my men, after all, spare his life and yours, or does that dark forest hold the dust of mother and child? Dead! dead!" he muttered, "and all the years that have gone could not blot out the memory of your face, nor of his little fierce grey eyes. Eyes such as mine, my God!"

He put his hand to his brow and went slowly up and down.

"My eyes!" he whispered in a voice of horror. "Did Ferdinand lie? He could not—he would not have dared. She was false. She did not deny the charge. Her silence proved her guilt. I will not face the horror of her innocence. And yet, and yet! There was something in the bold bearing of the man when he confronted me that seemed to warn me. This mystery unmans me. It enfolds me as the forest shrouds that hidden grave. Oh, for one hour of action!"

Something struck the roof near his feet, and by the spluttering light of a match he saw a tiny dart. He stood with it in his hand, then went softly to the parapet and listened. But the silence was unbroken, and after several minutes had elapsed he went softly downstairs to where Mr. Milcent was dozing. "Look at this."

"What is it?" said Mr. Milcent, looking curiously

from the tiny and apparently harmless weapon to the grim face.

"It is a dart from a blow-pipe. It means that a party of Indians have arrived, and that we have two enemies to face. Let us seek the roof, and see if we can find out what this little messenger means."

When they reached the roof Mr. Milcent threw one of his fire-balls down into the yard, and the flare blazed up and died away without revealing a single foe. But in the cold hours of the early morning they heard men moving and the sound of voices, which continued for some time. No attempt, however, was made on the house. At daybreak they looked eagerly over the parapet to see what work the enemy had been carrying out in the night, and to their dismay saw what looked like the muzzle of a cannon directed through a breach in the wall direct at the door. There were no men in sight. They were probably resting behind the wall; but there, plain enough, was the long chace and dark menacing muzzle of a formidable gun. The Colonel used his field-glass, for it seemed to him that his eyes had proved him false, then with a deep growl he passed the glass to Mr. Milcent.

"Why, it's the trunk of a tree."

"Yes, — them! They've taken the pith from a soft tree, hardened the bore by fire, thrust the butt into a larger tree, and bound the barrel round with green hide. It is an old idea of Ferdinand's. It will stand one discharge, and that discharge may blow the door in; but I doubt if they will have the pluck for the rush. Anyway, stand ready to meet them with a rapid fire, and I will take my place downstairs in case some of them do get in."

"Ho! señor," said the scout, "there's another gun at the back."

"The devil there is. That's awkward. Milcent, come down with me and take charge of your battery. As soon as you hear the guns explode touch off all your

mines. The ladies will wait on the top stairs until the stones have fallen, and then seek the roof."

The two went below, aroused the ladies, sent them up to the top of the stairs, and Mr. Milcent took his stand by his tiny battery, while the Colonel waited in the patio with a heavy revolver in each hand.

There followed then a time of terrible suspense. An hour dragged by, finding each man at his post. Mr. Milcent was still standing, but his hands shook, the perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead, and there was a strained look in his face. The Colonel leant against a wooden column, with his arms folded, his grasp still on the revolvers, and the smoke curling up in regular puffs from a cigar. His eyes were fixed with the intent look of a man listening, but his breathing was even. On the roof, young Gomez was swearing under his breath, and at the other side the old scout was chewing coca, as he squatted against the parapet, with his hands stretched out over his knees and his Winchester across his lap. On the stairs the three ladies sat silent, two clasping each other's hands for companionship, and Marion holding Jack with one arm, while her disengaged hand firmly grasped her rifle.

So they waited, listening, enduring a prolonged torture. Then burst the roar of an explosion, followed by a rending and crashing noise, which shook the house and filled the rooms and stairways with a thick dust. It seemed that the walls were falling, but above the crashing and noise of falling objects there came the hoarse shout of Colonel Colston calling to Mr. Milcent to stand ready. Then came the wild yell of the gauchos, the sharp ring of rifles from the roof, followed by a volley from the enemies, the vicious hissing of bullets entering the broken doors. Then came the word "Fire!" and a second later the house rocked to its foundations as Mr. Milcent fired the three mines. Many of the falling stones crashed on to the roof and into the patio with the noise of a bombardment. Then, as the fearful din

ceased, there came the sound of men shouting without. Gomez and the scout dashed down the stairs, almost tumbling over the group of women, and Marion flew to the roof, whence came the sharp crack of her rifle. The others followed her and went to the parapet where she stood. The walls were levelled to the ground, and high up rolled away a huge black cloud of smoke and dust. In the yard was a litter of wood and stone, with several still forms, and from the heap of fallen stones came pitiful groans, and beyond on the plain, towards the great ruins, the gauchos were retreating, fighting as they went, but not inclined to make a stand against their three pursuers, who crouched from rock to rock.

Miss Dunell shuddered and turned away. There was nothing picturesque or romantic in this fighting, no blare of music, no heroic figures, but the pungent smell of powder in the air and the groans of injured men.

Mrs. Milcent, after one look, went downstairs to her husband. He was sitting back in the chair by the battery. She went softly to him. He had been struck in the chest by a bullet flying at a tangent—struck before the order to fire the mines—and he had sunk into his chair, to die at his post, alone, without the mercy of a last farewell to the wife he loved.

She knelt beside the still form, and when she arose she stood awhile fighting against her sorrow and despair, then took a pitcher of water and went outside to the wounded men. Jack found her there, and clutched her dress as he followed her from place to place, lifting the stones from the crushed limbs of three men who wept and cursed and called upon their saints by turns. They heard suddenly the sound of men running, and scarcely had they heard when Jack was caught up and a strong grasp laid on her wrist.

"My brother!" wailed Jack, and buried his face in his brother's neck.

It was Elmore and the Cacique, and behind them a strong band of painted Indians from the forest. They

slipped like shadows into the house, barricaded the sundered doorways, and were soon in possession of the quinta.

Mrs. Milcent took her stand by her dead husband as the wild-eyed savages entered the room with fierce, suspicious glances.

"He is dead," she said quietly.

Tupac turned to the warriors and waved them out.

CHAPTER XXXI

BROTHER AND SISTER

COLONEL COLSTON returned from his sortie triumphant, with just the trace of a swagger in his long stride, and his two men came behind singing, Gomez the younger every now and again breaking into a shuffle.

When they were near the quinta he looked up to the roof to see whether there were any of the ladies there, and saw the feathered head-dress of an Indian, with the dark face beneath of El Demonio, and on his shoulder the fair head of Miss Dunell.

He stood still stunned at the sight—then the blood rushed to his face, and he threw up his rifle.

"Drop her!" he shouted.

As Tupac turned his head, Marion stepped between him and her father.

"They are friends," she cried; "Mr. Elmore is here."

"Out of the way!" he roared, the veins swelling on his forehead, and his bushy brows flattening down over his eyes. "Out of the way, or, by —, I'll shoot."

"Señor! Mother of God! your own children!" and Gomez struck the rifle up. "Yes, señor, I, even I did it," and the young man waited with arms folded.

The Colonel glared at the man, then felled him to the ground with his fist, then ran to the barricaded door.

"You cowards," he cried hoarsely, "you dogs, come out! come out!" and he swore till the women inside covered their ears. He struck his fist against the wood

till the knuckles bled, and then strained with his shoulder against the barricade till it yielded a little, when he thrust in the muzzle of his revolver and fired, raising a chorus of angry shouts from the Indian warriors who had been warned not to fire. Elmore warned them back and stepped forward.

"Colonel Colston, have the sense to recognise that you are beaten. We are better able to protect this house and those in it than you are. Your game is up, and the best you can do is to leave the valley."

"You hound!" cried the infuriated man, and once again he began.

"Silence, sir. If you have no fear of God, have some respect for the dead." It was Mrs. Milcent who spoke.

"Is he dead? Did I kill him after all?" asked the Colonel exultingly.

"Mr. Milcent is dead. I ask you to no longer profane this house with your fury. If you have any manhood left, go, and may Heaven forgive you."

"May Heaven forgive me!" he said with a bitter laugh. "Is there any angel in Heaven who would not rage if such a trick were played on him? Dead, did you say? Your husband? Tell me—did they kill him, those men who are your friends?"

"He died at his post, before you left, unattended, unnoticed. Please say no more."

"I am sorry," he said gravely, mastering his passion. "And yet, madam, death did not find him unprepared. Your husband was a man, the most simple, the most steadfast, the bravest of us all." He saluted, turned on his heel and walked away, erect and calm, without one trace of that ungovernable fury he had shown. Gomez was standing wiping the blood from his face, and the old scout was stretched out behind a rock, wearily scanning the house.

For a second she turned white as death and reeled against the door—then she mastered herself and went.

"Men, I am alone, without a troop, without shelter.

You will find food and shelter and friends in the quinta. You may leave me."

Gomez looked from the Colonel to the quinta, out of his half-closed eyes, then went on mopping his face.

"Where will the señor go now?" asked the scout.

The Colonel looked round, then smiled grimly.

"Does the hunted man tell the place of his hiding?"

"What are we, Excellency? Am I not a man? Have I not fought as a man? Is not Gomez the son of a brave father? Speak, then, for we are yours still."

"I am weary of the quinta," said Gomez thickly.

"Are you true yet? Good. We three will hold together. Our bandoliers are empty. First, then, let us fill them from the store left by our enemies."

"Ho! ho!" cried the scout, as he wriggled to his feet. "This is better. While the gauchos and the Indians fight, we will rule them both."

He went on ahead with Gomez to where the dead lay, and gathered a full supply of cartridges, while Colonel Colston strode on behind with his head up, never again turning to glance at the quinta. From the roof his progress was watched by three people. Miss Dunell, who had recovered in time to hear his furious outbreak, did not realise yet why he was going, and was already more concerned with the singular man whose dark face she had found bent over hers in intent study when she opened her eyes. She glanced now at him timidly, and Marion's gaze also went from him to her father, in a mute questioning. Neither of them had yet spoken to him, for he was fierce, forbidding, with a smouldering hate in the eyes that followed every movement of the man, his father, whom he had tricked.

When the Colonel and his two men had almost disappeared, having taken a direction towards the wooded and rock-strewn base of the cliff on the right, Tupac whistled up an Indian and gave him orders. A few minutes later, Marion saw the man warily following in the direction taken by the three, and she knew that

he had been sent to spy out her father's hiding-place. She turned with a feeling of despair at her heart, and found her brother's eyes bent upon her.

"Well," he said harshly, "you wished to ask me something."

The tears came into her eyes. "Do you know?" she whispered.

"Yes, I know."

"He is your father. We are brother and sister, you and I."

She looked at him, yearning for a brother's greeting, but his cold eyes gave her no answering proof of affection. There was something in him, some power behind the dark, square face, some influence beyond a natural sternness, that seemed to rear a barrier between them.

"I am my mother's son," he said in a low voice, "and between you and me, and between me and him, there is the shadow of her grave."

The two stood facing each other, her breast heaving, his face proud and implacable. Elmore, coming up, looked at the group with a gloomy face.

"Ah," said Beatrice, "here is the knight of the mournful countenance. Am I to congratulate you on a victory—if I may so dignify the manœuvre you have just completed, of dodging in during the absence of the enemy?"

"For Heaven's sake," he replied in a low voice, "don't. This is not an occasion for flippancy."

"What is it?" asked Marion in sudden alarm.

"Is it possible you have not heard of Mr. Milcent's death? Mrs. Milcent is alone. Will you not go to her?"

"What is that you say?" cried Beatrice. "Dead! My uncle! Then what will become of me?"

"I think you need have no fear for yourself, Miss Dunell," said Elmore.

Marion choked down a sob, took Miss Dunell by the hand, kissed her, and led her away.

"Is that the way you speak to the lady you love?" said Tupac.

"I love her no more. It is your sister that I love."

"My sister?" The Cacique laid his hand impressively on Elmore's shoulder. "Do not think of her. She is not made for love."

"Man! Have you any feeling against her, too? She has done you no wrong; but think how her life has been clouded, and if you have in you any trace of mercy, you will not add to her sorrows."

The Cacique shook his head gloomily.

"She is of a race, Elmore, that has been doomed to sorrow. Look, my brother, look at yonder ruins. They are the sign of our decay. If you would be happy, mate yourself to that fair girl, but do not seek an alliance with one of us."

"An hour of love would cure you of your fancies, chief."

"It seems to me, my friend, that if the medicine can be so easily changed as you have changed yours, it can have little effect. Well, I have spoken. Now for the next move."

"What is it?"

"To clear this sacred spot of those accursed robbers."

"And then?"

"Then you and your friends had better go while the way is safe."

"And you?"

"I will remain," and he cast a dark look in the direction taken by Colonel Colston. "This place will see the end of us. Do not try to dissuade me, for I know, Elmore, our fate has been marked out. When Nature decrees the death of a type, the type dies out entirely, whether it be animal, or tree, or man. There is nothing left of the Aztecs but ruins, and a dim legend of their religion and their laws. They were a gentle, peace-loving people, and their code has no place among the fierce races who struggle for existence."

Jack came out on to the roof. "I know you," he said, going up to the chief, and gazing open-mouthed at his savage trappings, the marks of tears on his cheeks. "And my bird knows you. He calls you Tupac; and he cries, 'Huala-ala! Huala-ala!' after he's been dreaming in the sun."

"You two have met. Jack, this is also my brother. You must like him too."

Tupac smiled, a smile that for a moment lit up his sombre face.

"Strange," he said, "that a bird only should know me. What do you find in that, Elmore? For me it is proof enough that I am outcast. Look at the little boy, and think that I was once like him—childlike and innocent, and look at the road that lay before me." He pointed to the gloomy vastness of the Montana. "Thither my course led, with one loving, weak, and anguish-stricken woman." He looked at the forest, then muttered low, "It is enough—my mother—it is enough. I have only to think of that and I am strong again."

He stood looking at the forest for some minutes, until his face grew hard again as he abruptly turned away.

Jack shuddered. "Brother," he said, in a tired voice, "I would like to go. The peoples make me sorry for myself. Always they cry, and look angry; and the noise runs in and out of my head."

"It will soon be all right, little chap," said Elmore, with a sigh.

"The big man he said so. 'It will be all right,' he said, and he is gone, and there is dark shadders on the stairs, and eyes that look at you always. I am frightened, brother, and tired, and I will go to the white lady."

"The white lady, little chap?"

"She is there. See!" and he pointed to the far-off pinnacle of snow, that gleamed serene above the black gorge. "I see'd her up there and she called to me. 'Little boy,' she said, 'come to me. It is cool,' she said, 'up here, cool and quiet, and no angry peoples,

and loud noises to get into the little boy's head. Come to me, little boy,' she said, and I think I will go, brother."

"How would you go, Jack?"

"There is a man downstairs, the sky man, and he sits and he sits, but the thing he sees with has flewed away. The lady said. Well, that's how I will go. The other ladies came in and they cried when they see'd him, but she did not cry. She jes' brushed their hair with her hands and looked away, a far way, and her eyes were like the eyes of the white lady up there. See?"

"I see," said the elder brother gently.

"Now, you will cry too. It makes me tired."

"Not me, sonny. I'm not going to make you sad. Sit down here and I'll tell you a story of Ole Brer Rabbit, that will make you laugh."

So Elmore made pretence of being merry and spun out the alluring yarn of the wily rabbit to chase away the sadness from the heart of the little boy, where it had no right to be. And as he related the wonderful victories of ole man Cotton-tail over Brer Fox, he found presently another listener in the Cacique. A low, musical laugh just warned him of this, and a swift glance showed him the dark, strong face bent down, with a strange look of childlike wonder in it. Jack noticed him too.

"Sit down!" he said. And when the warrior somewhat shyly stretched himself out with his back to the parapet, the boy sat on his lap with his fingers on the haft of the machete, and his curly head against the sinewy breast, scarred with recent, self-inflicted wounds.

Presently Elmore left the two of them together, the youngster at full sail on the sea of imagination, and the keen grey eyes of the warrior laughing back into the brown ones. He entered the sitting-room, littered with broken glass and pieces of mortar and the walls starred with bullet-marks. He had been sitting in a little recess for some minutes, thinking, when he heard the rustle of a dress, and, looking out, saw Marion throw

herself into a chair and cover her face with her hands, while her body rocked in a storm of silent agony. He rose and went to her side, laying his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Don't," he whispered.

She looked up, her eyes wet and heavy with pain. "I did not know any one was here," she murmured, and stood up.

"Can I help you?"

"You?" she whispered. "You have your own trials to bear. I cannot burden you with mine."

"Yet I would be glad if you would."

"Ah, no, do not think of me, but of the others. If you would do me a kindness, help Mrs. Milcent. She has shamed me by her nobleness. No word of reproach, nor look—nothing but tenderness—and her husband dead in my father's quarrel. Help her, oh, help her!" and she threw out her hand with an imploring gesture, while her dark eyes glowed through her tears.

"I wish to help you," he said quietly. "Marion, look at me."

She looked, and her face softened, then she shuddered. "Ah, no," she whispered.

"Yes," he said; "yes, for I love you. I love you, dearest. Give me the lover's right to help you."

"I have done you wrong enough," she answered, in tones so low he could scarcely hear, but he took her in his arms, and as her face was upturned towards his, he pressed his lips on hers.

She gently disengaged herself and looked at him steadily, while the colour that had flooded her cheeks died away as the tenderness left her eyes. "I thank you," she said gently. "A week ago it would have made me a happy woman, but now it is a memory that I may cherish and cherish only as a memory. You know why I may not give any other answer."

"You love me, Marion," he said, thinking only of himself. "What do I care for else? What more do I

want? And these shadows you speak of will melt before the sunshine of our love; the quarrel, unnatural and rooted in misunderstanding, will sink before our happiness." He held out his arms, "Come!"

"Hush!" she whispered.

From without there came a low wail, answered from within by one fierce and deep. There were steps on the stairs, and Tupac stood at the door with lowering brows.

"What is it, chief?"

"Death!" he said with a snarl. "Death! And you speak of forgiveness. My scout has been slain, and the men clamour for vengeance. I am going." A moment later his voice could be heard giving orders.

"If you love me," said Marion, "go with him—go with him." She paused and her eyes glowed while she stood erect. "Yes, and kill him rather than he should be guilty of his father's death."

"Kill him!" he said, with a look of horror. "He is my brother. He saved my life."

"I am his sister, and I saved your life." She thrust out her arm and pointed to the angry cicatrice. "If you love me, go, and prevent this crime at all costs, even," she repeated with a sob, "at the cost of his life."

Elmore turned and went, leaving her standing rigid, with outstretched hand and a look of command in her eyes. There was the clatter of weapons, the movement of men without. Her arm fell to her side, her long lashes drooped, and she fell in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXXII

FERDINAND'S QUEST

ALL this time Ferdinand had been busy working out the clue to the hidden treasure. He, too, had seen the figure on the summit of the red tower that night Colonel Colston had fired, and his inspection of the tower decided his opinion that the man, whoever he was, could not have scaled the column from without, as the outer surface was quite smooth. He must have scaled it, therefore, from within, and if from within either through an opening in the base of the column to be reached by diving, or from some underground communication with an inlet beyond the lake. With the help of canoes carried from the river, and of a diver, he had attempted first to discover an opening under the water. The gauchos were not at all at home in the water, and it was only after a rather heavy offer that he induced a mulatto to undertake the task. The man slipped in, and with his hand on the gunwale felt about with his toes against the slimy rock, and only when they had made the slow circuit of the column without any result, could he be induced to dive. At the first attempt, however, he felt an opening in the solid rock and, coming up, announced his intention of going ashore. The promise of fifty more libra had an effect, and after a stiff glass of fiery spirit he took his flat nostrils between his fingers and sank out of sight. Those watching waited, but they saw him no more. A sudden flight of bubbles came up out of the dark water, and one of the men

declared he heard a muffled cry, but though they waited a full hour, their comrade did not return.

"I will pay one hundred libra to the man who will go down," said Ferdinand, breaking the silence.

The men lifted their paddles and pulled hard for the shore, jumping out as the canoes grated, and running for dear life to the camp, where they began all together to explain, with violent gestures, what had happened, with guesses at the dark fate that had befallen the mulatto. Ferdinand, who at heart was as superstitious as his followers for all his cynicism, mustered all his tact and coolness to keep the unruly band in order, and that done, he searched the base of the cliffs to see if there were some underground inlet, bearing in mind the general indication of the sun circle. At sunrise he saw that the column threw a shadow to the cliff at a spot where there was a narrow cleft in the towering rock. He examined the rock carefully, inch by inch, using a magnifying glass. After much labour he found a small fragment of native cloth, and above it a nob of rock, by which he drew himself up, resting his toe in a thin crack. Beyond this there was no foothold, and he was about to give up this clue when he noticed a peculiarity in the crack on a level with his face. For a space of a few feet the edges were not sharp. Using the glass, he discovered with secret joy that over the space in question the crack had been cut, and that it was only a few inches deep. This artificial cutting extended three feet—and using his glass at the junction of the real crack with the artificial, in a horizontal direction, he traced a thin joint. Evidently a block of cut masonry had been let into the cliff at that part. He began to press down the sides of the square, and when he came to the right-hand side, the stone gave. An extra pressure caused it to turn, and he looked into a dark hole, out of which came a breath of warm, moist air.

Marking the position of the stone, he went back to the camp to see to the completion of the two tree cannon

for use against the quinta. Later on he returned to the ravine provided with a torch and a lasso. For an enterprise of the dangerous nature he was to embark upon Ferdinand possessed the right qualities of coolness and caution, and on climbing through, he prevented the stone from swinging back by inserting a stick in the joint, leaving an opening for the light to stream in. Then he lit his torch and looked about him. He was at the entrance to a narrow passage, formed originally by the crack in the rock, and widened out to the height of a man by human action. The walls bore traces of smoke, a homely indication of human agency which gave him much comfort.

He continued along the passage for some twenty yards, when it terminated in a flight of steps descending at a steep slope into a black well, out of which came the noise of running water. He hesitated here for some time, but finally, plucking up courage, went down, till he stood upon the edge of the underground stream. This he found flowed swiftly along a trough, some three feet in width, hewn out of the solid rock. The path followed the stream for a few yards, then suddenly the darkness grew less, and he stood on a sort of gallery above a great underground cavern or chamber, the floor lined with white sand, which reflected a thin streamer of light pouring through a crack in the roof. Stepping across the stream to the narrow lip of rock beyond, he looked down into the chamber, whose floor was about ten feet below. Then he walked along this natural gallery the whole length of the cave, which extended thirty paces, when the stream disappeared into a small opening. Evidently he had come to the end of the underground track, and further search would have to be conducted in the cavern itself. It was a simple enough thing to reach the floor of the cave by a jump, but he had no idea of taking this risk until he could see a way up the wall, which appeared to be perfectly smooth, as if polished. A closer investigation, however, presently discovered to

him a small hand-hole in the dip of the gallery at the spot where he had entered, and a foot-hole about half-way down. Beside the hand-hole there was a deep groove in the lip of the gallery communicating with the water trough—a trifling thing in itself, but which subsequently he had reason to remember.

Sitting down and firmly grasping the niche made for the fingers, he lowered his body till his toes found a hold, and then sprang lightly to the soft sand. No sooner had he touched the ground than he was seized with an unreasoning terror, and leant against the smooth wall trembling, as his wild glance sought to pierce the dim shadows ahead. There was, however, no sign of living thing, and no sound but the soft swishing of the swift stream above, and with a curse at his cowardice he stepped out, with his torch held aloft and his pale face thrust forward. As he went, he glanced repeatedly over his shoulder to see how far the step was off in case something took shape out of the moving shadows, for he could not quite shake off his first haunting fear.

He had advanced half-way across, when the light from the torch was reflected from the far end, and with a cry of delight he ran forward, the light ahead growing brighter until it shone like burnished metal. And metal it was—the most precious—a round knob of it set in the breast of a human figure, carved in relief out of the solid rock. It was the figure of Quexacotl, the god of rain; and the plumes that branched from his head were also in gold, of a duller hue. He laughed. He had found the treasure—alone. The store of fine plates taken from the Temple of the Sun was evidently behind this god. He rapped with the butt of his revolver against the breast, and it gave forth a hollow sound. The small golden plate or knob in the breast seemed strangely bright. He took hold of it and pulled. It gave a little, just enough to show that it was attached to a rod of metal. In his excitement he dropped the torch, which went out, and in the sudden darkness he grew terror-

stricken again. With trembling fingers he struck a match, relit the torch, then peered anxiously around. Now he noticed, for the first time, strange symbols on the sand—curves and circles—and following them he saw against the wall a dark object.

As he stared at this he made out the figure of a man, still and huddled up, but somehow familiar. With eyes nearly starting from his head, he edged inch by inch nearer until he recognised the face of the mulatto who so mysteriously disappeared at the tower in the lake. His gaze went wandering away from this poor figure to the figure of the god; then on tiptoe, as if fearful of waking the dead, he went swiftly to the far end, struggled up the smooth rock, and fled with a yell up the dark steps and along the passage, stumbling and hurting himself in his mad race. Squeezing through the opening, he scrambled to the ground and stood gasping and mopping his brow. Then he closed the opening and went back to the camp, his whole soul in a tumult of greed and fear.

One thing he felt, and that was that he would not return to that cavern alone, no, not if he were certain he could lay his hand on every hidden plate. He would get some one else to face the unknown horror of the place, to find out the secret of the mulatto's death, and he knew how to take his own share of the treasure, and keep it too. But whom was he to trust, so far as he was prepared to trust any one? Not one of his band of ruffians, for if he could bring himself to trust one of them, there was not one who would face the secret passage. His thoughts turned to Colonel Colston, and he began to develop a daring scheme for making use of his services. It would be risky, he knew, but cupidity was a powerful aid to rely upon, and the only difficulty he saw was that of communicating with the dangerous man he hoped to make his tool.

That evening Ferdinand approached the hiding-place of the Colonel, among huge boulders, at the base of the

cliff, back of the ruins. He carried no weapons, but stood boldly forth unarmed, giving a low call that was understood by the gauchos. In a few minutes he was in the presence of the man he sought.

"Colonel," he said, with a show of frankness, "I want your help."

"If you have any regard for your life," said the other quietly, but with a steely glitter in his eyes, "don't jeer at me. You know I have been driven from the quinta."

"I heard you had been mastered by a trick,—not driven."

"You know! Then why do you come to me? Unless, indeed, you thought the news too good, and wished to see for yourself and rejoice over my helplessness. You see me! Do I look as if I were beaten? Do I? By Heavens, I will do such mischief before I am dead as will make——"

He rose up and stood glaring at his visitor, his veins swollen.

"I have found the treasure," said Ferdinand.

"You! And what then? And you come to tell now—but I tell you! You will not leave this place to secure it except with me. If I cannot have it, neither shall you."

"I wish to share it with you, sir. I have not even touched it, or looked at it. Come, forget our quarrel, and take the lead, as of old, again. We can act alone, without any word to the rest."

"Are you lying?" was the hoarse reply.

The two men looked at each other, the one fiercely, the other calling up all his nerve to meet that terrible glance without showing the treachery that lurked in his heart.

"I am unarmed," said Ferdinand. "I will lead you to the place now under cover of the darkness, and if I give you cause to suspect me you may do your will on my defenceless form. Will you join with me?"

He threw his head back and held out his hand ; and, looking into his eyes, the Colonel clasped the proffered hand.

“Lead!” he said, “and may God have mercy on you if you are false.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GAUCHOS SURPRISED

TWO hours after, silent forms moved up out of the darkness and took up a position round the Colonel's hiding-place; but when, having satisfied himself that every man was in position, and that no fugitive could break through, Tupac summoned the last and the greatest of his enemies to come forth, there was no answer. Then the chief with the bravest of his warriors crept stealthily up, each one carrying a bolas, so that they could take the enemy alive. A long time it took them slipping like shadows, and stopping to listen, but in the end they found the lair empty. A stick was laid on the dying embers, and presently one of the Indians took a flaming brand, and held it close to the ground, his beady eyes glaring like those of a snake. He searched patiently, going over the ground inch by inch, and, when he had done, he pointed at one spot and at another. The ground gave up its secret. The others glanced long and gravely, and they saw that a fourth man had been there, wearing a heeled boot.

"It is well," said Tupac. "The gauchos have sent for him and he has gone. Our enemies are all together. We will fall upon them."

In a few minutes a body of plumed men were moving swiftly off round the southern end of the lake, to take position on the far side, while Tupac mustered the remainder and drew them off to the shadow of the ruins, where they waited, watching the flickering fires of the doomed gauchos, for the fatal signal.

Tupac stood leaning on his rifle, with his glance fixed on the silent waters of the lake. The hour had come at last. The revenge he had been seeking all his life was to be satisfied, and he was uneasy because he felt no fierce joy at the thought. What spot than that in which he stood could more swiftly stir his blood to the sense of a burning wrong? And yet he had to fix his mind upon the wrong and to go over again all the suffering of his gloomy life, starting from that first terrible remembrance of his mother's sad, lingering death, to call up a flash of furious hate. And that died away too; and he turned his glance to the fires, wondering at which one his enemy sat, wondering what the morning sun would look upon. Then he sighed heavily and turned his head in the other direction at a slight noise. One of the warriors slipped off into the shadows, and presently returned with the message that a man from the quinta was approaching. The footfalls became clearer as the new-comer came blundering on, and he had strayed right into the crouching warriors before a low hiss warned him of possible danger. He stood rigid listening, and the click of the lock sounded sharp.

"You had been dead, my brother, before you had known you were in danger."

"Thank God, chief, I have found you."

"Speak lower. Why do you seek me?"

"I have heard no firing. Am I in time? You have not found your father?"

"Not that word," came the fierce whisper. "He has escaped."

"Thank God for that. Listen to me! For the sake of your sister, for the sake of your mother in her, of all that is womanly, give up the search. You will be the happier."

The chief was silent.

"If not," said Elmore firmly, "if you will not give up this devilish purpose, then——"

"Well?"

"I must use force. I cannot let you do this thing. Better you should die than have that crime on your heart."

"Force, you say!" said the other passionately. "Is there any force but death can free me from my vow? If that is the force you mean, strike, and you may go free." He drew his head up, and, facing round, said a few words in Indian, whereat the warriors muttered.

"You are not alone," said Elmore.

"They will do you no harm," he said fiercely. "Strike, I say," and he flung his arms out.

"Why are these men here? Why do you wait?"

"It is always so," cried the chief bitterly. "You threaten and do not act. Why are they here? I have arranged to attack the gauchos, and am waiting for the signal."

"I will join you in that, for it is soldiers' work."

"So you side with me now, and yet it would be better if you returned. There are no men at the quinta."

"Send some of your men there, chief. I will stay with you."

"There may be," he said, "friends of yours among the gauchos."

"No friends of mine."

"Nevertheless, I ask you to watch; for there may be friends of yours over there."

"What do you mean, chief?"

"Hist!"

Over the lake, clear and mournful as the tolling of the death-bell, came the call of a swan.

Tupac gave a brief order. "I mean," he said, with a terrible smile, "that the man you call my father is with the gauchos." The warriors stood up, making a faint rustle. Then they went forward swiftly, silently, nearer and nearer, to the doomed camp, until of a sudden a wild yell from a startled sentry broke the deep silence.

"The savages!" he cried, and fired wildly. Before the echo broke out a crashing volley, followed by the

wild vibrating war-whoop, and the gauchos fled away out of the range of the fires that revealed them to their pursuers. When they thought they were safe and began to rally, their blood was turned to water by the shock of another fierce cry from the rear. Presently they found that their women and children were untouched. Then their courage returned, and they fought, each man where he stood, with fierce oaths, even some of them with laughter. They fought and they died, one by one, not a single man thinking of the folly of surrender to the wild-eyed, active men who raged warily around them. The women and children were led off to the quinta, where the ladies, wakened by the sound of the fighting, had waited in terrible anxiety, and there the poor creatures received attention and what comfort they could derive from tender sympathy.

The men remained on the field, and early in the morning the Chino scout rose from among the dead whither he had crawled, and lifted his arms in token of submission. He was led to Tupac, who had been awake all night waiting for news from the scouts he had sent out in search of the Colonel, Ferdinand, and Pedro, whose absence from the fight he had early in the night learnt from a wounded gaucho. The little man stood for some moments searching the face of the chief.

"If you were a span taller you would be the finest man I have seen. Yes, and I have seen many. But what matters? I, too, am small of stature, yet your people know me as the Yaguaranti—the small jaguar who is the most cunning of all."

The old man had his touch of vanity, and the warriors who were near gratified him with a grunt expressive of surprise.

"It was I who tracked you in the forest—who made the ambush—who surprised your camp."

"Are you tired of life?" said Tupac harshly, not over-pleased at the reference to his short stature.

"I alone was not deceived by the cry of the swan in the night. I smelt the fight on the wind and moved away. I am here of my free will to have speech with you, whom men call El Demonio."

"And you wish now you had not come, boaster?"

"There speaks El Demonio and not the great chief. Old age has its claims. Had you been old, Indian, you would be a great leader; and yet it is the white blood in you makes you terrible and quick to strike."

"Enough!" said Tupac darkly; "do not discuss me."

"There is one thing only I may not look upon, and that is the face of the sun," said the old scout quietly. "And the children of the sun are no more. There was one—the last—but she died in the Montana."

"Cease!" cried Tupac hoarsely, with a threatening glance.

"I have seen eyes like yours in another face and have not quailed in the face of El Tigre. Me he never despised. To him I was no boaster, no feeble old man. And now he is in danger and I cannot help him—but you can."

Tupac grasped the scout by the wrist. "Does he send to me for help?"

"Does the jaguar turn to any in his need, least of all to the cub who has sought his life?"

"Old man, you try me sorely."

"It is well," said the scout. "I play the last stake. Neither he nor I fear death, and I would let him die rather than you go to him as El Demonio."

"Do you, knowing all, ask me this?"

"I know nothing. I have served on the warpath and in the hunt as his ears and eyes, and he did not consult me in other matters. Yet I led you when a child, and I know the sorrow of his heart. Must he die?"

"Tell me, you who have served him, is there any good in this man? Is there one gleam of tenderness?"

"He has been just to me."

"He would have been just to a dog for less."

"I have heard him in the night calling on those he loved."

"He would not be human if he did not. Come, have you nothing to say for him? Is there not one good act you can remember?"

"Boy, are you his judge? I will say no more. It is not due to him as a warrior that I should make a show of his deeds as if he were a slave. All I ask now is that you let me go; for if I cannot serve him, I will be avenged on his murderers."

"Who are they?"

"I have done," said the scout.

Tupac stood for some moments with head bent and frowning brow. "Lead me to him. Let him be his own judge. Be not afraid. Trust me."

"It is well. Last night Señor Ferdinand came to my master and talked to him in secret. Then they went off together, and I tracked them. When they had gone a little way I saw they were followed by Pedro. They avoided the gaucho camp and went up to a ravine, where they stood. After a time they vanished, and it seemed to me they were swallowed by the rock. And all the time I know his Excellency did not know that Pedro followed. For that reason, I say, there is treachery meant; and because also I heard one word spoken of hidden gold."

Tupac started and took a few hasty strides towards the lake. "Too late!" he cried. "See, the waters are sinking."

"What is it all about?" asked Elmore anxiously.

"It means that your Colonel is underground searching for the Inca treasure, and that the water is pouring in upon him."

"Underground! Where? I do not understand."

"Look at the lake, it has sunk already a foot. The inlet is stopped."

"What has the falling water to do with him?"

"I hope everything. No one finding the treasure may seize it without drawing the waters upon him. You will understand presently. But now go." He stood staring at the lake and muttered, "This is the best, let the dead avenge the dead."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FLOWING WATER

FERDINAND led the Colonel straight to the ravine as the Chino scout had related, and in his anxiety to allay the suspicions which he knew existed in the mind of his companion, he revealed the secret passage, and dark though it was, entered a short way. When they emerged they were startled by the terrific din of the fight, and as they stood listening, to unravel from the cries the meaning of the fight, the Colonel was the first to understand the situation and the first to seize it.

They sat there listening to the dying echoes of the fight, and in the morning, in the grey of the dawn before the mist had risen, they re-entered the passage. When the last of the three had entered, Ferdinand thrust the point of his knife into the crack, thus securing the slab, and preventing its being thrust in from without. When the block was closed all sounds beyond were shut out, and instead a heavy murmur echoed from the bare walls, stirring the damp, stifling air. So gloomy was the sound, so impenetrable the darkness, that once inside they paused, awed into silence. Then, with a muttered exclamation, Colonel Colston struck a match, and holding it in his hand attempted to peer into the darkness ahead; next, turning, threw the pale yellow gleam on to the dark faces of his two companions, and sought to read them. Their eyes did not meet his, but looked past him into the darkness.

"It is like a tomb!" he said, in his deep tones, which sounded hollow, and particularly solemn.

Pedro muttered and crossed himself, and Ferdinand echoed the Colonel's words: "It is a tomb. A body lies beyond—the body of one of my men, whom I last saw in the lake. I tell you frankly, I would not have entered alone for anything. But with you I feel no fear."

A torch was lighted, and the Colonel taking it cast one more scrutinising look at his shrinking companions, and then with his revolver in his right hand passed slowly on. Ferdinand picked up the lasso he had left, and tried the running noose as he followed, while Pedro drew his machete. They descended the steps, and presently stood on the brink of the water-course overhanging the large cave, whose white floor gleamed strangely under the red light of the torch, now flickering to a soft current of air which followed the stream. The Colonel stood tall upon the rim, holding high the flare, and the two dark figures stood behind him in the dark, nothing showing but the gleam of their dark eyes.

"No! Mother of God! I am not going down there!" cried Pedro.

"Stay where you are, then," said the Colonel, and swung himself down, after handing the torch to Ferdinand. They walked away a few yards, whereupon Pedro, in an agony of terror, yelled out for them to wait, but as they would not, he summoned up courage, and, trembling all over, crawled across the water, and holding to the brink, let himself drop to the floor, where he lay groaning.

"Get up!" said Ferdinand savagely.

"Why did you bring such a craven?" growled the Colonel, who, stooping down, caught the man by his collar, and lifted him to his legs, giving him a shaking which rattled his teeth, and finishing with a terrific kick.

"Now, take the torch."

They went on to the far end where stood the image

of the Inca god, and Ferdinand pointed silently to the gold boss in the centre, but his glance went off uneasily to the dark shadows under the wall.

"It was over there," he muttered, "over there in the shadow. Can you see anything?"

The Colonel walked over firmly, and with his hand against the cold wall felt about with his feet.

"There is nothing here," he said.

"It must be there," cried Ferdinand, "against the wall."

"You were dreaming—or afraid. I tell you there is nothing!" And the Colonel kicked the sand up with his heavy boot.

"Horrible!" muttered Ferdinand, wiping his forehead. "How could the dead move? My God! what was that?"

Pedro dropped the torch with a yell, but the Colonel, jumping forward, picked it up and held it whilst with grim set face he looked towards the tunnel above, into which the stream disappeared, and from which a sharp, menacing sound seemed to have come when Ferdinand cried out. As he stood with his weapon ready the others crept up behind and looked, too, with blanched faces.

"We are like children, frightened at shadows!" And so speaking, he fired into the dark hole, and stood with frowning brows waiting for what might come. The report crashed against the roof and rumbled away into unknown hollows, but there came nothing out of the tunnel, no sound. Then he went slowly round the great cave, the two keeping close at his heels. As they returned to the end a ray of sunshine filtered through a crack in the roof, and shot down to the sand, threading the darkness like a vein of gold, and following it came other slighter threads, till the whole cavern stood revealed in dim outline; and at these gentle messengers from the warm day without, their fears vanished at once. The Colonel thrust the torch into the sand to quench

the flame. "If this place were provisioned, we three could hold it against all-comers."

The Colonel grasped the gold centre-piece and pulled. At his tug there came a creaking noise; then as he leant back, every muscle straining, the whole front of the figure moved an inch or so.

Ferdinand went down on his knees and with his hands scooped away the sand, leaving bare a space of rock. Then both he and Pedro grasped the edge of the stone figure where it stood clear, and all three pulling, the tall stone, grating, creaking, came forward on stone rollers, moving in grooves, leaving exposed a dark inner chamber. They thrust their heads in, shouldering each other fiercely, but could see nothing for darkness, when the Colonel swept the others back, regained the torch, lit it, and entered. By the light they saw a chamber some ten feet square, and lofty. The course of the stream skirted the side high up, as they could tell from the sound of running water, but what fixed their attention and held them speechless was a pile of square packages reaching from the ground up to the level of the stream and apparently entering the vault above. Thrusting the torch into Ferdinand's shaking grasp, the Colonel seized one of the packages, felt its weight with a fierce shout of pleasure, and hurled it to the ground. The bindings, which were apparently of skin and wood, split open, and through the bulge gleamed the yellow of gold—burnished gold. They stood gloating over it; then each cast a furtive, suspicious glance at the other, and Ferdinand began to finger his lasso, which he carried over his shoulder.

Pedro went down on his knees, fumbled with the broken packages, and handed up several gleaming plates, bright, thin almost as paper, and each one bearing on its polished surface a delicate tracery. He balanced one on the tip of his fingers and then glanced at the pile of packages.

"Eh, Ferdinand, there is no packing that weight on our backs?"

Ferdinand groaned, showing his teeth, and gulped, but he did not speak. He could not, for fear of showing his exultation. He felt disposed to shout, to laugh, to leap; and his little fingers played about the smooth coils of the lariat.

"Bear that to the other end against the passage. No, Ferdinand, no skulking. Work, man; lift and carry, you devil. Take this." He seized another package, thrust it into Ferdinand's arms with a loud laugh. Ferdinand staggered off grunting, and after setting down his load at the top end, back he came running with Pedro. So they toiled, going one way swaying under the weight, and running back uttering strange cries, until one column of the boxes had been removed.

"This second pile is fixed against the roof. We shall have to loosen one in the middle, and stand away while the pile falls."

"It will spoil them, the beautiful plates, if they fall."

"Spoil be ——." The Colonel drew out the machete, and with a few fierce strokes cut away the lining from a package in the centre, then bearing with the point against the plates at the side he managed to thrust out a few. The packages above subsided a little, and by dint of tugging, and hacking, and thrusting, he succeeded in removing the middle package, when the whole pile slipped down, followed by a splash in the water, which scattered a shower of drops over them.

"My God! what a ransom!" exclaimed the Colonel, as he wiped his forehead. "And you laughed at me for keeping up the search."

"Why, it was I who heard of its existence. It was I who showed you the valley—who brought you here under the pretence of seeing a beautiful girl."

"Stop. No word about her."

"I suppose that memory is not very pleasant to you, especially at this moment; but, nevertheless, it is neces-

sary to remind you that if it had not been for me you would not have seen this."

"If it had not been for you, miserable informer! Don't recall what you have done for me. Even this would not repay me."

Ferdinand shrugged his shoulders, for the hard grey eyes were upon him.

"Mother of God!" screamed Pedro, pointing to the floor of the cave, his eyes starting from his head.

Across the spectral white of the floor came creeping softly in coils and curves a dark shadow, in shape like a huge serpent.

"You miserable coward," growled the Colonel. "What are you afraid of? It is the water."

"I thought—I thought it was the Evil Thing," muttered Pedro.

From the far end of the cave came the soft lapping sound of falling water, and the coiling shadow on the floor came creeping on, in and out among the strange spirals that Ferdinand had noticed in the sand, until it came up to their feet, then spread along the side.

"One of the boxes must have fallen into the water-course and stemmed the flow."

"Yes," said Ferdinand, and he added under his breath, "but I do not mean to be drowned. I will look into it," he said aloud, and went to the far end. Here he saw to his alarm a strong jet flowing out of the lip above the niche in the wall where they descended. Unless there was an outlet from the cave, he judged there would, in a few hours, be several feet of water on the floor. As he went back he loosened the lariat.

"It is all right," he said, "but I think we had better not delay with the work, unless you are tired," and he passed the end of the lariat quietly to Pedro. As the Colonel turned his back to enter the inner chamber the coil fell over his shoulders, a sharp jerk tightened the running knot, pinning his arms, and a second stronger tug pulled him down. His wrists were still free. He

felt for and drew his revolver, and fired as well as he could, sloping the barrel backwards and pressing the trigger with his thumb. The powder scorched his face. One bullet caught Pedro in the fleshy part of his arm, and he let go the lariat with a yell. The Colonel, struggling all the time in grim silence, rose to his knees, though Ferdinand hung on with all his strength, and he would have gained his feet had not Pedro, casting about for a weapon, seen a package of gold. Lifting this with both hands, he hurled it down, striking the Colonel partly on the shoulder and partly on the head, at once rendering him insensible. As he fell the water splashed. Already it had covered the floor.

"Quick!" shouted Ferdinand, who was trembling violently. "Leave him. Back to the other end! We must save what we can!"

They ran back, splashing as they went, and when they reached the place where the packages had been piled up, they saw that the water was falling in a sheet all along the brink.

"I will climb up, and you hand the packages to me, Pedro."

Pedro glared at the other, then ran back to where the Colonel lay. He snatched up his machete, and came hurrying back, his white teeth showing.

"I will get up," he said, "and you stay here. Yes, carrambo! I say so."

Ferdinand's heart turned to water when he realised how completely he was at the lesser ruffian's mercy.

"Very well," he said, making a tremendous effort to steady his voice.

Pedro, muttering threats, started to climb, but a douche of water in his face drove him back. Then he made Ferdinand give him a back, and he drew himself up, wringing wet.

"Now," said Ferdinand, "throw me the knife, or you will not get a single package. Not if I drown. I swear it."

Pedro tossed the knife from him. It gleamed through the twilight and fell with a splash. Then Ferdinand, white to the lips, and raging inwardly with muttered curses, toiled like a slave under the falling water, passing the loop of Pedro's lasso round one at a time, while Pedro drew them up and swung each to the steps beyond. About five of the packages had been drawn up, and already the water stood above Ferdinand's knees.

"I can work no more," he said. "You must come down, Pedro. You are taller and stronger. Be just, friend. I am tired out."

"I am not greedy," jeered Pedro, "there is enough here for me."

"Yes, yes, but come and lift one or two for me. I am cold with the wet. There is no danger, for as the water rises you can swim easily to the side."

"Then stay there. I am wet also. I will go and get dry. If possible, smoke."

Ferdinand begged, prayed, but Pedro, standing up, looked down mockingly at him. But as he stood laughing something touched him on his cheek—something light, and soft. He turned his head swiftly, and looked into two white, stony, sightless eyes, set in the broad head of a huge anaconda. As he looked, the black forked tongue flickered from between the blunt jaws, and with a moan he reeled forward, plunging head first into the water, and after him, coil on coil, slithered the great serpent.

Ferdinand, with a scream, tore with his hands at the wall, and, almost choked by the falling water, found the niche and drew himself up, and floundered across the stream, and went, panting and moaning, half-way up the steps. Then he smote his hands together.

"I will have one," he said fiercely, and went back till he could look out again over the cave. One package he carried off to the top of the steps, and that done, he thought it would be better if he had two. Back he

went, his face gleaming out of his matted hair, and this time he remained to look at some object standing out of the water.

"Pedro," he muttered, "is that you?"

The figure came nearer. "It is I, señor," came in muffled tones, "give me your hand. I am hurt to death."

Ferdinand stooped a little lower, then he laughed.

"My hand? No, thank you, Colonel. I have no wish to risk my life again. But I thought you were dead."

"Come, Ferdinand, don't be a fool. Let bygones be bygones."

"What a thousand pities you did not take that tone before, my friend. But I am afraid it is too late now." He laughed again, while his glance went keenly to right and left. "Be satisfied that you have Pedro down there with you. He thought, like you, to get the better of me."

"It is not pleasant down here," said the Colonel, with a slight shudder. "Remember, I can float, and when the water is on a level with the rim, I will help myself, then, if you do not help me—I will kill you. Help me now, and I will help you in everything. There is some devil of a thing swimming about here."

"I saw it, an anaconda. You are in good company!" He prepared to lift the package. "Good-bye, my friend, but before I go I would like you to look into the past you are so ready to forget. Listen, Colonel Colston, and let this be your last thought. It may comfort you. Your wife was true."

"Man! Do not mock me."

"It is true," said Ferdinand cheerfully. "It was necessary to my plans that she should go, and you fell into the trap with the blundering ease of a jealous fool."

"You lie! You lie, devil!"

"Keep that title for your own offspring—that unnatural son whose hand has been against his father, to

whom you must trace your present state—your son El Demonio.”

“Ferdinand, unsay it, and I will trouble you no more.”

Ferdinand laughed again.

“Unsay what? That she was true? That woman who bowed her head to you without one word in her defence, whose dignity even affected the gauchos, whose innocence was plain to all but her jealous fool of a husband in the calm beauty of her face——”

“Oh, my God!”

“Ah, yes, think of her. Dwell upon each particular incident of that last meeting, and may each thought bring to you a life’s agony concentrated into the brief seconds that are yours to live.”

“I could bear all—all but this.”

“You will bear more,” hissed Ferdinand. “Look! What is that thing by your side? Look, man, look! And may you at last know what fear is as well as remorse.”

The Colonel turned his face, grey and ghastly, and saw a few feet from him the yellow throat and sightless head of the great serpent. He looked at the fearful spectre a moment and shrank away, then turned his face again to Ferdinand.

“I see,” he said with an effort, “and you have nothing to fear from me. Do not lie more. But tell me that you have been lying.”

“You are hard to convince. It is true—as true as it is that El Demonio was the little boy you turned away with her—your own son. Don’t glare at me! Look at it! It draws nearer, nearer. Ha! ha! you are indeed caught in the toils of the Incas whom you offended when you murdered her. And I—I am safe. I will go to El Demonio and tell him of my vengeance.”

“I am here!” said a deep voice from the darkness behind. “I have heard all. But the vengeance is not complete.”

Ferdinand looked round. “Is it you?” he muttered,

and he seemed suddenly to grow old, while he stretched his hands out to steady himself. "See! There he is! Down there in the water, helpless. I did it. You are revenged."

"I heard all. Say no more."

Tupac paused upon the brink, looking down at the grey face of his father, at the grim, broad, menacing head above it, then plunged in, a knife gleaming in his hand. The dive carried him to the Colonel's side, and his dark, eagle face rose beside him.

"Strike!" said the Colonel firmly; "I am ready. But I loved her boy. Strike. I would not live now." But Tupac went round nearer the grim, motionless head, and, swimming quietly, pushed his father before him. Slowly they drew nearer to the side, where a tall Indian stood waiting. But at the motion of the waters about its body the sightless thing darted its head forth till the quivering tongue lightly touched Tupac's face. Then the muscles of its neck stiffened like a bar of iron, coiled back with the broad head thrust forward for the blow, then, as the strong hands of the Indian grasped the Colonel by his arm, the stroke was delivered, and Tupac with a groan fell back into the dark waters. As the Colonel rose to his feet the Indian cut the lariat that still bound his arm. He struck Ferdinand a crushing blow, as he stood bereft and motionless, then, turning, sprang again into the water. A few yards out lay the huge black and yellow coils gleaming under the feeble sunlight, and out of them rose a face with eyes closed, and the long black hair floating on the water.

"God, give me strength," he cried, "but a little while, for her son's sake—my boy." With his uninjured arm he caught his son, and, lifting him to his shoulder, went back, the water reaching to his arm-pits, and his face to the serpent. Back he went, and again the huge head shot out, and as it came near he held Tupac up with his left arm and with his right hand caught the sinewy throat.

"Quick," he gasped, "take him!"

The Indian seized the senseless form, and the Colonel was jerked forward.

"Oh, father!" rang out a fresh voice, "father!"

"It is well with me, Marion. Look to your brother, he is hurt. Waste no time. Take him out at once."

She saw the dripping figure at her feet, and with a man's strength lifted it and went staggering up the steps. Elmore looked over.

"Is he safe?" came in gasps.

"Yes, sir. My God, what can I do?"

"Do!" The Colonel laughed with an exultant ring. "Kill that man Ferdinand. Then let me die, for now I have done, and I am glad. Yet will I die fighting. Glad!" he muttered, gasping heavily, as the huge serpent, gathering coil upon coil for a leverage, strained its arched neck back, almost lifting him out of the water. "Glad! glad! for her sake and his—my wife—my Huala."

The end came in a terrific lashing that sent the waters flying in clouds, which drove the awed and terrified spectators back, leaving Ferdinand lying face downward over his gold.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE WHITE LADY

ANOTHER night had passed, and the sun rose gloriously upon the valley, bathing the gaunt ruins in a flood of light, and gleaming red upon the tall column. Peace had come, but there was no peace in the hearts of those who survived the struggle and tragedy of the last few terrible days.

The lamentation of the coloured women mourning for their dead made a volume of melancholy sound that sank and wailed, and sank and rose in a torturing rhythm. The wild fowl wheeled overhead, uttering their surprise and fear in harsh notes, too startled to settle; and about the quinta there were silent forms with heavy, sleepless eyes and heavier hearts. Marion had surrendered herself to a wild fit of passionate weeping—the intensity and violence of the grief being terrible to look upon. The barriers of restraint she had through long years reared up had been swept away, and the long agony of the motherless girl who had known no father's love—who had had to fight alone, unaided, trusting to an inborn nobility—broke out till nature was exhausted. Miss Dunell had endeavoured to give the girl comfort; but she had flown from the room terrified and in tears; and in the early hours of the night Mrs. Milcent took her place, sitting and watching, till in the end the compassion in her sorrow-lined face brought peace to the tossing girl.

In the morning she awoke and listened to the wailing of the women without. Then she sat up and swept the dark hair from her forehead.

"Where is my brother?" she whispered.

"He is well, my dear girl. Rest a little longer."

Marion shuddered and sighed. "Rest—rest—there is no rest for me. Awful—oh! how awful—and I can see it now—the dark waters——"

"Hush, my darling. The sun has risen, and as I looked just now upon the valley there was the seal of God upon it in the fresh beauty of the morning. The line streamed upon the sun tower; and it seemed to me that it had never looked so beautiful. You know the tower where my husband used to stand?"

Marion started, and was about to speak, but there was something in the face that looked so gently at her that made her pause.

"Oh, Mrs. Milcent," she cried, instead; "you have been here all the night—watching, and you—and you——"

"Yes, I have lost him, Marion. I am alone now—this is my place."

"Put your arms round me," said the girl like a little child; and Mrs. Milcent sat down on the couch with her arms round the girl's waist, while with a soft touch she smoothed the heavy coils of her black hair.

Presently the girl flung her arms round her companion. "I am afraid," she said in a thrilling whisper; "I see it again. Do you hear?—the sound of water. I hear it. Louder and louder."

"It is not water, dear child. The women are chanting—they also have their sorrows. Poor things—let us go out and comfort them."

"I cannot—you go."

"Not without you, Marion. Come, my dear—there are many of them, and each has lost father, or brother, or husband. Let us go."

"No—no—they madden me. Tell them to be quiet—I can hear water—I say I can. Why don't you go away and weep too? I have not seen you cry."

"Oh, Marion!"

"I cannot bear it—the sound is in my head," and she flung herself back moaning.

Mrs. Milcent stood up. "If you wish it," she said quietly, "I will go."

"Yes—go. No—no, stay. I don't know what I am saying."

"Then lie down. I had a little girl once, Marion—a dear little girl with blue eyes—and when she was ill, poor suffering mite, this is what I sang to her." With tears in her eyes and voice, the little lady, whose heart was near breaking at her own suppressed grief, sang the simple words of a baby song. The effort was too much even for her brave spirit—the voice broke ere yet a verse had been sung, and she buried her head in the pillow.

Then like a rush of light into her troubled soul went the knowledge of the divine love of her companion, and Marion grew strong.

"Come," she whispered, "let us go out to the women."

So they went out through the littered yard down to the toldos, where the dark women sat wailing with the frightened children standing unheeded by. There was work for them there to keep them busy—work in preparing a meal for the children, in attending to the wounds which several of the women had met with in the wild night fight, and in comforting the others. Miss Dunell and Elmore joined in the work, but Tupac did not show himself.

Elmore kept near Marion all the time, but he found time to press Mrs. Milcent's hand and to express his thanks.

"Do you know where her brother is?" she asked.

"He went off alone about sunrise. He rose up suddenly from his bed—being roused by Marion's weeping—he listened a moment—then, motioning me not to follow, went hurriedly out. I think he is in the ruins."

"See if you can find him. No—stay by her—I will go."

"You are an angel," he said.

A sad little smile hovered about her lips. "If I did not constantly keep working," she said, "I should break down."

She went down to the ruins bent upon finding Tupac, though every stone of them seemed to call out her loss, and the square pyramid beyond more than the rest. As she went through the colonnade of tall grey stones she heard the sound of a man chanting, and going in the direction, through roofless courts, she came to an open door, through which she saw the man she was in search of, naked to the waist, his black hair streaming down his back, and his broad breast streaked with blood. The madness of remorse was upon him, and she stood afraid and sick at heart. If he had appeared before her, stricken with grief, or sullen with brooding thoughts of wrong, she would have gone unhesitatingly to his side—but now at the revelation of the savage—a prey to gloomy superstition—she shrank from her task. As she shrank back a little hand was placed in hers. She cried out at the touch.

"Why, you is frightened."

"Oh, Jack—is it you? Yes, I was frightened. Let us go away."

"I am looking for my parrot. He flew over here. See—there's the dark man. You wait till I ask him."

"Do not go to him now, Jack."

"My—he does look funny."

"Come, Jack, take me out, there's a good boy."

"Oh, I won't be long," and he went towards that savage figure while she leant against the wall, too weak to prevent him.

But the little boy had no fear. Straight up he went, and she heard his clear childish voice:—

"Has you see'd my parrot?"

Tupac turned his blood-shot eyes on the boy. "Has you see'd——" There he paused with open mouth and wide-opened eyes fixed on his torn breast. Tupac turned his back. "Away," he cried, "this is no place for you."

"My parrot," muttered Jack, then he edged round to see again that fascinating, dreadful sight.

"Go!" shouted the other—"quick."

Then she hurried forward stumbling, and at the sound he faced her. "You frightened me at first," she said, "but Jack was not afraid. Children know best whom they can trust. I want you to comfort your sister."

"I," he muttered. "What comfort can I give? Leave me."

"Take him by the hand, Jack."

"Leave me. I am no sight for him."

"True," she said quietly, "nor for me. I do not like to see a brave man give way as you have done. I thought better of you. Marion is helping the poor women up there—come and help her."

And he went with them—staring before him—until he found himself on the border of the lake, and she washing the blood from his self-inflicted wounds.

"Do you think well of my sister?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied.

"It is enough," he answered, and went back into the ruins, whence he returned presently properly clad.

Next day Elmore set to work to sink a cross cut below the cavern, guided in his operations by the appearance of several new low springs of water which welled up through the crevices in the roof of the cavern. When he had gone down six feet he cut through the course of the subterranean stream, and by means of a dynamite cartridge re-opened the channel, freeing the pent-up water. Then he bored through the roof and pumped the water from the cavern. The bodies of the dead were recovered—the Colonel found with his hand still grasping the throat of the huge sightless serpent which had been drowned by the rising of the water.

After Elmore had finished his work and recovered, he fled and sought out Marion.

"We go to-morrow," he said. "Jack and I want you. You will come with us."

"I will remain with Tupac," she said. "We have been so long parted—and now he could not do without me. Could you, my brother?"

Tupac looked into her eyes steadily. "He is my blood-brother. What is mine is his, and even my sister. Some day perhaps I will meet you again in your English home—but whether I do or not, I will be the happier for knowing I have such a sister. I go now, my sister, to our mother's grave to tell her all is right with you and me."

"You must not remain in the forest long," said Mrs. Milcent; "from what I learn, it is too gloomy, and you must have light."

Tupac looked at her with one of his rare smiles. "I think," he said, "you must be the White Lady."

"The White Lady. What do you mean?" and she put her hand to her temples, where a few threads of white showed, a faint flush on her cheeks.

"Let us ask Jack. Jack, I think we have found our White Lady. Look—is she not here?"

Jack put his hands behind him, and with his head on one side, in queer imitation of the parrot which he had recovered, looked from Marion to Miss Dunell, who came up. Then he glanced up at the pinnacle of snow.

"She has gone," he said. "See," and with a turned finger he pointed up to a cloud which veiled the snow peak. Then he took Mrs. Milcent's hand and looked up inquiringly at Tupac.

"You have found her, little boy. And now you have found her, see that you love her always."

"And what about me?" said Marion.

He took her hand and placed it in Elmore's.

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